

The theology of Karl Barth as a resource for inter-religious encounter in the
European context, with special reference to the Abrahamic faiths

Glenn A. Chestnutt

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Signed Declaration

I, Glenn Alexander Chestnutt, hereby declare that I have written this thesis and that the work it contains is entirely my own. I furthermore declare that this thesis has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signed

Date

1st May 2008

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	iv
Abbreviations	v
Abstract	vi
Introduction	1
Chapter 1	The concept of religion in Barth's early work and a refutation of the charge that he is solely an exclusivist 8
Chapter 2	Barth's understanding of Islam historically, politically and theologically, and the central importance of his theology of Israel 33
Chapter 3	Truth <i>extra muros ecclesiae</i> I – "secular words" of the Kingdom: providing the Church with criteria to receive words from other religions 74
Chapter 4	Truth <i>extra muros ecclesiae</i> II – the "little lights of creation" as analogous to the just state: providing the Church with an arena for inter-religious encounter 102
Chapter 5	Bringing Barth's theology to Islam in the contemporary European context 142
Chapter 6	An inter-religious encounter with Tariq Ramadan 176
Conclusion	203
Bibliography	209

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ABBREVIATIONS

CD I/1	<i>Church Dogmatics</i> , vol. I, part 1, second edition (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975)
CD I/2	<i>Church Dogmatics</i> , vol. I, part 2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956)
CD II/1	<i>Church Dogmatics</i> , vol. II, part 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957)
CD II/2	<i>Church Dogmatics</i> , vol. II, part 2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957)
CD III/1	<i>Church Dogmatics</i> , vol. III, part 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958)
CD III/2	<i>Church Dogmatics</i> , vol. III, part 2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1960)
CD III/3	<i>Church Dogmatics</i> , vol. III, part 3 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1961)
CD III/4	<i>Church Dogmatics</i> , vol. III, part 4 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1961)
CD IV/1	<i>Church Dogmatics</i> , vol. IV, part 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956)
CD IV/2	<i>Church Dogmatics</i> , vol. IV, part 2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958)
CD IV/3	<i>Church Dogmatics</i> , vol. IV, part 3: first half (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1961) and vol. IV, part 3: second half (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1962)
KD	<i>Die Kirchliche Dogmatik</i> , 13 vols., (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1932 and thereafter Zürich: EVZ, 1938-1965)

ABSTRACT

One of the biggest issues facing the Church at the beginning of the twenty-first century is its encounter with Islam. This thesis will argue that the theology of Karl Barth can be used as a resource for Christian inter-religious encounter in a European context with the other Abrahamic faiths, in particular Islam. An analysis of his work suggests that it defies the stereotypical typology of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism.

This thesis will demonstrate that Barth's theology of Israel is central to his understanding of Islam. While there is residual anti-semitism and negative stereotyping of both Judaism and Islam in the Barthian corpus there are also resources available here to compensate for this. One resource can be found in Barth's discussion in §69.2 entitled "The Light of Life". Here Barth's work offers the potential for allowing for the possibility of discerning God's presence in the other Abrahamic faiths. It thus provides the potential of acknowledging what those religions can teach Christians about Christianity.

This thesis will also examine the section at the end of §69.2, commonly termed "Creation and its lights", revealing that the argument within which it is set parallels that which is associated with Barth's application of the just state as a parable (analogy) of the Kingdom of God. The just state is a state which strives for the common good for both Christians and non-Christians.

One place where inter-religious encounter can come to concrete expression is within the public arena. This thesis will argue that a case can be made on the basis of Barth's theology for promoting a democratic society which respects freedom and difference – this is argued on Christian grounds. This argument can be extended to accommodate religious pluralism. Other faith groups can contribute to a just society and interact in ways which are theologically fruitful for the Church's own life. The final chapter of this thesis will illustrate this point by investigating what an encounter between the Church, as Barth conceives it, and the Muslim scholar Tariq Ramadan might look like. Ramadan's work illustrates that there is also a basis in Islam for

open, pluralistic societies dedicated to democratic ideals. The Church can make common cause with Ramadan on the topical subjects of gender equality, socio-economic policies and the war against terrorism. But the Church can also learn about its own faith from this encounter. Ramadan's work comes to the Church as a "secular" parable of God's kingdom, calling the Church to renewed humility, repentance and revision of doctrine.

INTRODUCTION

Daniel Migliore, in his Gunning Lecture of March 6th 2007 at the University of Edinburgh, rightly argues that the new encounter between Christianity and Islam is “the greatest religious issue of the twenty-first century”.¹ While these two world faiths have co-existed in tension for almost 1400 years, there is added urgency today to their encounter with one another. It is an encounter that is taking place worldwide. It is no longer the case that Christians and Muslims live in separate countries thousands of miles apart:

Today the Muslim world population is estimated to have reached almost one billion, one-fifth of humanity. Islam occupies the centre of the world. It stretches like a broad belt across the globe from the Atlantic to the Pacific, encircling both the ‘haves’ of the consumer North and the ‘have-nots’ of the disadvantaged South. It sits at the crossroads of America, Western Europe and Russia on one side and black Africa, India and East Asia on the other. Historically, Islam is also at the crossroads, destined to play a world role in politics and to become the most prominent world religion in the next century.²

Migliore correctly highlights in his Gunning lecture that, even beyond demographics, current events have catapulted Christianity and Islam into a new, complex, and highly-charged encounter. The terrorist attacks on the New York Trade Center and the Pentagon on “9/11”, the subsequent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the suicide bombings in London on “7/7”, Madrid, and other cities, the continuing Palestinian-Israeli conflict: these and other events virtually guarantee that Christian-Muslim relationships will be burdened and stretched by unrelieved suspicion and most likely deep hostility for many years to come.³

¹ See Daniel Migliore, “The Different Power of God: the Witness of Christianity and Islam”, Gunning Lecture delivered in Martin Hall, New College, University of Edinburgh, 6th March 2007.

² Gerhard Böwering, “Christianity – Challenged by Islam”, in *Islam: a challenge for Christianity*, ed. Hans Küng and Jürgen Moltmann (London: SCM and Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1994), 114. Specifically, Peter Mandaville contends that Islam has, over the past two decades, become exceedingly prevalent in Europe. Estimates of Muslims living in Europe range generally “between 9 and 15 million” thus constituting the largest religious minority group on the continent. See Peter Mandaville, “Towards a critical Islam: European Muslims and the changing boundaries of transnational religious discourse”, in *Muslim Networks and Transnational Communities in and across Europe*, ed. S. Allievi & J. Nielsen (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 127, 129.

³ Migliore, “The Different Power of God: the Witness of Christianity and Islam”.

Adding to the problem, Migliore contends, is the lack of preparation that the Christian Church and Christian theology bring to this new and complex engagement with Islam.⁴ The Church lacks even a working consensus about what the goals of the Christian community and Christian theology should be in this encounter, let alone what are the best means to achieve these goals.⁵

This thesis will argue that in this context the theology of Karl Barth has something to contribute to the encounter with Islam. Barth's theology has often been overlooked with respect to inter-religious encounter. Barth himself never really deals with the issue. This is perhaps partly why he has also been blamed for the virtual moratorium on inter-faith encounter between the publication of Hendrich Kraemer's *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (1938)⁶ and the beginning of Vatican II in 1962. In tandem with this perception of Barth, pluralist theologians, such as John Hick and Paul Knitter, argue that fruitful inter-faith encounter necessitates a revision of traditional Christology, and in particular a departure from Christian claims that salvation comes through Christ alone.⁷

⁴ Migliore, "The Different Power of God: the Witness of Christianity and Islam".

⁵ Ibid. From a Eurocentric position Hinrich Stoevesandt gives a possible reason for this situation: He contends that traditionally the Church in the West has viewed any encounter with non-Christian religions as an exotic exercise on the edge of academic credibility. However, the situation in Europe in which the Church finds itself today is one akin to the situation of the early Church during the Roman Empire: the only other time in its history that the Church has had to exist as a minority in close proximity to other religions in Europe. Stoevesandt highlights the fact that all religions were tolerated in the pantheon of the Roman Empire: all these religions were diverse but had a commonality in being coerced to give allegiance to the "official emperor cult of the state". The only two religions which found this type of pluralism incompatible with their belief systems were Christianity and Judaism. See Hinrich Stoevesandt, "Wehrlose Wahrheit: Die Christus bekennende Kirche inmitten der Vielfalt der Religionen", *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 102 Jahrgang, Heft 2 (Juni 2005), 206. In many respects one can draw an analogy from the early Church experience to the religious pluralism of contemporary Europe, a pluralism existing within the secularism of the modern European state - an analogy that Stoevesandt's argument seems to suggest. But this thesis will attempt to argue that the Church's existence and cooperation with other religions in this context is not founded on necessarily idolising secularism. Rather it should be founded, as Eberhard Jüngel believes, on understanding secularism as a 'child' of Christianity with pluralism being a necessary outworking of this relationship, where Christianity acts as a 'pointer' to secular society of the future they share in common (See Eberhard Jüngel, "The Gospel and the Protestant Churches of Europe: Christian Responsibility for Europe from a Protestant Perspective", *Religion, State and Society*, 21.2 (1993), 142).

⁶ Hendrich Kraemer, *The Christian Message in a non-Christian World* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1938).

⁷ See for instance John Hick and Paul Knitter, eds., *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books and London: SCM, 1987).

Indeed, pluralist theologians claim distinct advantages for their approaches to the reality of religious pluralism. They claim that they allow for the reception of new truth from outside the walls of any given religious community, while also claiming to provide conceptual frameworks across confessional boundaries, i.e., for public theologies. They normatively contend that there is more than one true religion, where each religion shares a common core, or end. S. Mark Heim identifies this end as *salvation*: “a single process that takes place within all major religious traditions, though not normatively understood or described in any of them”.⁸ He is correct to point out that “the largely undefended assumption that there can be only one religious end is a crucial constitutive element of ‘pluralistic’ theologies”.⁹ However, as Geoff Thompson argues, contra the pluralist position, there is in fact a “heterogeneity of the goals of the world’s religions” and any extension of the Christian doctrine of salvation to other religions is therefore problematic.¹⁰ This is because, J. A. DiNoia argues, different religious communities may proclaim deliverance or escape from the present human condition, but “they differ profoundly in their descriptions of the nature of that condition, the higher state of being to be sought, and of the appropriate means to achieve it”.¹¹

Hence, this thesis asks a question normally answered by “pluralist theologians” and does so with reference to an unexpected source: How can one turn to Karl Barth as a resource for constructing a theology which affirms truth outside the Church and which thus lays the groundwork for making common cause with Muslims?

To many, this might appear to be counter-intuitive, and a highly problematic question. For example, Attaullah Siddiqui writes:

The Church Dogmatics of Karl Barth (1886-1968) do not provide any opportunity for a fair hearing for the Prophet of Islam. The Prophet’s message and monotheism, Barth believes, is “no different than

⁸ S. Mark Heim, “Salvations: A More Pluralistic Hypothesis”, *Modern Theology*, 10 (October 1994), 341.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Geoff Thompson, “Religious Diversity, Christian Doctrine and Karl Barth”, *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 8.1 (January 2006), 3-4.

¹¹ J.A. DiNoia, *The Diversity of Religions: A Christian Perspective* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1992), 40-1.

‘paganism,’ ” a paganism all the more dangerous because Islam was able to instill in its followers the “esoteric essence” which Barth equates with monotheism. In relation to Islam, Barth was a theologian preoccupied with history, locked in the past, resisting the future.¹²

Certainly, Barth would have to reject most “pluralist theologies” because, “by definition, they posit other sources and norms of revelation outside or alongside Jesus Christ”.¹³ Barth explicitly states that “[a]s there can be no other sons of God, so there can be no other lords nor witnesses to the truth apart from or side by side with Jesus Christ”.¹⁴ This Christocentric exclusivism leads to the often-heard complaints against Barth’s view of other religions: that his is an extreme version of the claim that there is no salvation outwith the Church.¹⁵ These complaints are based on a misreading of Barth. That Barth leans towards some form of universalism is no secret: a large segment of evangelical Christianity has long opposed Barth’s Christology not only for its refusal to make a distinction between the ontic realization of reconciliation and its noetic appropriation¹⁶ but also because it appears to lead him down the road to universalism.¹⁷ Just how Barth’s work might be argued to be universalist or otherwise is not the focus of this thesis. What is at issue here is whether or not, as “an exclusivist in terms of his assessment of revelation”, Barth can offer an account of truth outside the Church and thus positive theological grounds for making common cause with Muslims.¹⁸

¹² Ataulloh Siddiqui, “Islam and Christian Theology”, in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918*, third edn., ed. David Ford with Rachel Muers (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 666. This opinion might reflect the general lack of interest in this area. However some do attempt to suggest that Barth might be a resource for an encounter with Islam: see for example Michael Bource, “Een uitlating van Barth over de islam”, *In de waagschaal*, 30 (2001), 495-6, At Polhuis, “De overhead als weldaad”, *In de waagschaal*, 34 (2005), 176-8 and Werner Schatz, “Karl Barth und der Islam”, *Reformierte Presse*, 35 (2005), 8-9.

¹³ George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 246.

¹⁴ CD IV/3.1, 93.

¹⁵ Paul O. Ingram, “The Christain Encounter with Non-Christian Religious Ways: A New Possibility”, in *Tradition as Openness to the Future*, ed. Fred O. Francis and Raymond Paul Wallace (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984), 107.

¹⁶ J. Leland Mebust, “Barth on Mission”, *Dialog*, 20 (Winter 1981), 19.

¹⁷ Donald W. Dayton, “Karl Barth and the Wider Ecumenism”, in *Christianity and the Wider Ecumenism*, ed. Peter C. Phan (New York: Paragon House, 1990), 182.

¹⁸ Tim Bradshaw, “Grace and Mercy: Protestant Approaches to Religious Pluralism”, in *One God, One Lord in a World of Religious Pluralism*, ed. Andrew Clarke and Bruce W. Winter (Cambridge: Tyndale House, 1991), 174.

This thesis argues that Karl Barth can offer resources for such an account. Chapter 1 demonstrates that the charge that Barth's position, with regard to non-Christian religions, falls simply at the exclusivist end of a spectrum which classifies positions within the specialty of *theology of religions* cannot be sustained. There is a radical inclusivity to Barth's christological and revelational exclusivity which indicates solidarity and concern for the other, the stranger. This insight provides a basis on which to build a constructive proposal for an encounter with religious others – in particular Muslims.

It is a well known fact, however, that Barth's theology does not give particular attention to the religions of the world. When he does speak of them, he usually does so in the context of his examination of the understanding of "religion" as he perceives it from within Christianity. With this in mind, Chapter 2 investigates Barth's understanding of Islam historically, politically and theologically. Central to his understanding of Islam is his theology of Israel. While Barth recognises the interdependency of Church and Synagogue, he associates rabbinic Judaism too closely with biblical Judaism thus eclipsing the distinctiveness of rabbinical Judaism. Rabbinic Judaism needs to be addressed on its own terms. By the same token, Islam should also be addressed on its own terms and not as any kind of derivation of rabbinic Judaism. The mutual dependency argued for between Church and Synagogue should also be extended to include Mosque.

While there is negative stereotyping of both Judaism and Islam in the Barthian corpus there are resources available within the same corpus to overcome this difficulty and to recognise the aforementioned dependency. One such resource is provided by Barth's account of extra-ecclesial truth in his Doctrine of Reconciliation, in particular his discussion in §69.2 entitled "The Light of Life." Chapter 3 will investigate Barth's concept of "secular words" of the Kingdom, arguing that here Barth provides the Church with criteria in order to receive words from other religions by evaluating them and by determining what use the Church is to make of them. This provides scope for Christian preconceptions concerning the content of scripture to be challenged, whilst also allowing for the possibility of discerning God's presence in the other Abrahamic faiths. It also provides an equally strong commitment to acknowledging the genuine diversity of those religions whilst

also acknowledging what those religions (in particular Islam) can teach Christians about Christianity.

While Chapter 4 recognises that Barth never gave clear examples of parables of the Kingdom, an examination of the few pages at the end of §69.2, commonly termed “Creation and its lights”, reveals that the argument in which they are set parallels that which is associated with Barth’s application of the just state as a parable (analogy) of the Kingdom. The just state is a state which strives for the common good of all. The service of the Church to the state is directed towards this. In striving for the common good Christians can make common cause with non-Christians because of their mutual dependency upon God. This mutual dependency parallels the mutual dependency argued for in Chapter 2 between Christians, Jews and Muslims. In this understanding, there is no reason to suggest that Barth’s term “non-Christians” should not be interpreted to include Jews and Muslims. Within Barth’s paradigm then, Christians, Jews and Muslims should be able to co-operate with each other and make common cause for the betterment of society.

Near the end of Barth’s life he mentioned the desire to devote himself to the history of world religions. Integral to this plan was the relation between Judaism and Islam. Chapter 5 argues that the foundation of Barth’s inter-religious plan would have been found within his understanding of God’s covenant with Israel and its fulfilment in Jesus Christ. This chapter will argue that the ontological unity of Christianity and Israel should be interpreted to include Islam; any inter-religious enterprise should be fundamentally ethical in nature: incorporating a responsibility for members of the Abrahamic faiths to struggle for justice, both individually and corporately, before God. But the Europe of today is inherently more secular and pluralist than the one of Barth’s time. Nevertheless, in tandem with Jeffrey Stout, Barth’s understanding of the just state can be extended to accommodate religious pluralism. Barth’s work implicitly provides an understanding of truth claims which provides unexpected potential for inter-religious encounter and cooperation. This potential can be explicated through Geoff Thompson’s interpretation of John Cobb’s understanding of pluralism. Thompson’s interpretation provides a framework for using Barth’s work for such encounter and co-operation. Barth’s theology can therefore be brought productively into conversation with Islam. The Church can use

aspects of Barth's theology on an *ad hoc* basis in seeking to promote common cause with Muslims on issues of social justice and political action by identifying elements common to both religious traditions. But this encounter also has the potential to testify to divine grace in ways that can contribute constructively to the theological and ethical self-understanding of the Church when aspects of Islam emerge as secular words of the Kingdom.

Chapter 6 investigates what an encounter between the Church, as conceived by Barth, and the Muslim scholar Tariq Ramadan might look like. Ramadan's work illustrates that there is a basis in Islam for open, pluralistic societies dedicated to democratic ideals. The Church can make common cause with Ramadan on the topical subjects of gender equality, socio-economic policies and the war against terrorism. But Ramadan's work also comes to the Church as a "secular" parable of God's kingdom, calling the Church to renewed humility, repentance and revision of doctrine.

Barth's theology can help Christians relate to Muslims by showing that God's grace is at work in places it is not expected – beyond the boundaries of the Church. The Church can be addressed through the presence and voice of the other and the stranger. In today's context this includes address through the presence and voice of Islam. This understanding can contribute in some small part to the renewed encounter of these world faiths at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

CHAPTER 1

The concept of religion in Barth's early work and a refutation of the charge that he is solely an exclusivist

Introduction

Karl Barth's view of religion is perhaps the most unpopular aspect of his theology for Christian theologians engaging in any aspect of inter-religious encounter. According to D. T. Niles, when he asked Barth how he knew that Hinduism was unbelief without ever having met a Hindu, Barth's reply was "*a priori*".¹ Anecdotes such as this one as well as Barth's formula "revelation of God as the abolition of religion" have led many scholars to regard Barth's theology as expressing a dogmatic and negative attitude toward non-Christian religions. This has helped to stereotype Barth as the most illustrative representative of an exclusivist attitude towards other religions.

Alan Race, in *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions*, develops a tripartite typology in terms of "exclusivism", "inclusivism" and "pluralism".² In elaborating this typology Race takes Barth's thought to represent "[t]he most extreme form of the exclusive theory".³ Similarly Roman Catholic Paul Knitter, in *No Other Name?: A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*, has taken Barth as his primary example of the "[c]onservative [e]vangelical" position which emphasizes the "centrality and uniqueness of Jesus Christ".⁴ Knitter seeks to overcome this position by his own proposal of a "[t]heocentric Christology" which he believes is more amenable to dialogue with other religions.⁵ Knitter offers a more extended analysis of Barth in his earlier (1972) doctoral dissertation at Marburg published as *Toward A Protestant Theology of Religions*, a study of the work of the German Protestant theologian Paul Althaus on this question.⁶ In this volume Knitter follows Althaus in using Barth and

¹ D.T. Niles, "Karl Barth – A Personal Memory", *The South East Asia Journal of Theology*, 11 (1969), 10-11.

² Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in Christian Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1982), 10-105.

³ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁴ Paul Knitter, *No Other Name?: A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1985), 80.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁶ Paul Knitter, *Towards a Protestant Theology of Religions* (Marburg: N. G Elwert, 1974).

Troeltsch to mark out the “Scylla and Charybdis for any Christian theology of religions”.⁷ Knitter accepts the label of Althaus to describe Barth’s position as “Christomonist” a “narrow, restrictive, exclusive understanding of the reality of Christ, which bans all extra-Christian reality into the realm of meaninglessness and godlessness”.⁸

While the exclusivistic tendencies that follow from Barth’s “Christocentrism” in both the method and content of his theology should not be minimized, the aforementioned interpretations of Barth are remarkably unsympathetic to his fundamental intention and fail to grasp some of the countervailing themes in Barth’s work that do provide some basis for greater engagement with non-Christian religions.

While Barth has some important things to say about other religions and their adherents, Barth does not undertake to provide a full-blown theology of religions. In fact, Barth has relatively little to say about particular *religions*, but a great deal to say about *religion*. In his mature theology of religion and the religions in the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth is rather less concerned with what Christians should think about non-Christians than he is with how modern concepts of religion, religious experience and religious consciousness have influenced what Christians think about being Christian.

This chapter intends to demonstrate that the charge that Barth’s position, with regard to non-Christian religions, falls simply at the exclusivist end of a spectrum which classifies positions within the specialty of *theology of religions* cannot be sustained. To be sure, Barth’s analysis of modern concepts of religion and religious experience could be deployed in an effective theological critique of pluralist positions. But, “while Barth is clearly no pluralist, his theology of religion and the religions is too complex to be tracked on the standard grid in any straightforward

⁷ Ibid., 37.

⁸ Ibid., 23.

way”.⁹ As Gavin D’Costa states: “Barth . . . overturns these categories by being both exclusivist, inclusivist, and universalist!”¹⁰

Ernst Troeltsch and the school of history of religions

Liberal Protestant theology developed in Germany in the nineteenth century under the influence of Friedrich Schleiermacher, Albrecht Ritschl, Wilhelm Herrmann and Adolf von Harnack, to mention only the more prominent among its representatives. Under this movement could also be classed a certain relativistic conception of Christianity among religions that was proposed by followers of the school of history of religions. Perhaps the most important philosopher of this school was Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923).

In 1908 Troeltsch, who was then professor of systematic theology at Heidelberg, wrote an assessment of the theological scene in his native Germany during the previous half century.¹¹ He found that the “chief characteristic” of that period was, in his opinion, the “decline of the church’s voice in the whole of public life, above all in the interests and intellectual horizons of educated Germany and across the whole spectrum of academic work”.¹² What the Churches were teaching was no longer a matter of public debate: “Ordinary academic and literary activity passes them by, and gets on with its own problems and tasks quite independently.”¹³ Church teaching had become mainly personal, subjective and confessional and attempts were made simply to make these conform with traditional statements of doctrine.

At the same time, Troeltsch noted, academic theology “has become far more indifferent to the problems of the church”.¹⁴ Indeed “the educated and liberal world perceives with naive astonishment” that the Churches, which it has largely disregarded, still exercise “some quite considerable political influence”, and of a

⁹ J. A. Di Noia, “Religion and the Religions”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 245.

¹⁰ G. D’Costa, ‘Theology of Religions’, in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918*, third edn., ed. David Ford with Rachel Muers (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 630.

¹¹ Ernst Troeltsch, “Half a Century of Theology: A Review”, in *Ernst Troeltsch: Writings on Theology and Religion*, ed. Robert Morgan and Michael Pye (London: Duckworth, 1977), 53-81.

¹² *Ibid.*, 54.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 55.

strongly conservative character.¹⁵ What is disastrous for a culture, Troeltsch argued, is when it attempts to separate what he called “religious faith” from “scientific work”.¹⁶ No, “the different sources of knowledge must somehow coincide and harmonize”.¹⁷ Here “scholars and professors” must lead the way.¹⁸ Such a harmony becomes possible when it is commonly recognized that the claims of faith have their meaning and truth not in some supernatural revelation apart from history, but in relation to the one historical world of which all knowledge is part. Theology is dependent “upon the general feeling of historical reliability produced by the impression of scientific research”.¹⁹

Troeltsch’s position involves two basic premises which he contended are essential to the credibility of any theological work in the modern world.²⁰ The first is that what the Church has traditionally called “revelation”, and assumed to be supernatural, is really the natural power immanent in religion. The second premise is that “human religion exists only in manifold specific religious cults”, which are relative to the surrounding culture and never unchanging or absolute.²¹ Thus the subject matter of modern dogmatics (contemporary theology) cannot be “simply the Bible or an ecclesiastical confession”.²² Instead, the whole relativistic cultural configuration of the Christian religion as it developed in the history of the world provides the data for theology.

For Troeltsch, if these two premises are accepted – that revelation occurs only in religion and that religion occurs only in historically relative forms – then theology faces an acute problem with the traditional claim of the Church that Jesus Christ is the one and only Lord and Saviour, not only for Christianity, but for the whole world. Troeltsch’s answer to this problem is to say that “with every advance in history of religions research into the origins of Christianity we see so many related

¹⁵ Ibid., 54.

¹⁶ Ibid., 57.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ernst Troeltsch, “The Significance of the Historical Existence of Jesus of Faith”, in *Ernst Troeltsch: Writings on Theology and Religion*, ed. Robert Morgan and Michael Pye (London: Duckworth, 1977), 199.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ See Ernst Troeltsch, “The Dogmatics of the ‘Religionsgeschichtliche Schule’”, *The American Journal of Theology*, 13.1 (January 1913).

²¹ Ibid., 1-2.

²² Ibid., 13.

yet originally independent religious and ethical forces flowing together, that it is quite impossible to treat Christian faith as something absolutely separate".²³ Once one begins to research the syncretistic origins of Christianity in history one is forced to acknowledge both that "Christianity is by no means the product of Jesus alone" and that it is impossible to call "the Christian community the eternal absolute centre of salvation for the whole span of humanity".²⁴ For Christianity to try to remain christocentric in a world of many "other centricisms" that increasingly intermingle would be similar to cosmology in the twentieth century trying to remain geocentric.²⁵

The constant in Christianity, Troeltsch concludes, is not Jesus Christ, for though these words designate the major symbol of the Christian religion, that symbol is interpreted variously in different times and places.²⁶ It is by no means certain that the Christian community and cult will "remain bound to the historical personality of Jesus".²⁷ The constant in Christianity, and what is essential for it and thus for theology, is that "the historical Christian religion" contains within itself a "productive power . . . to create new interpretations and new adaptations – a power which lies deeper than any historical formulation which it may have produced".²⁸ "Thus", Troeltsch writes, "we are thrust back again to history itself and to the necessity of constructing from this history a religious world of ideas which shall be normative for us".²⁹ The credibility of theology is to be determined by the cultural synthesis which it constructs to meet the religious needs of the time.

Barth on Religion

Karl Barth was a young Swiss pastor, fresh from training in the best liberal theology of his day at the universities of Berlin, Tübingen and Marburg when he heard Troeltsch lecture in 1910. He later wrote that after listening to Troeltsch he had "the dark foreboding that it had become impossible to advance any farther in the dead-end street where (theologians) were strolling in relative comfort".³⁰

²³ Troeltsch, "The Significance of the Historical Existence of Jesus for Faith", 189.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Troeltsch, "The Dogmatics of the 'Religionsgeschichtliche Schule' ", 12.

²⁷ Troeltsch, "The Significance of the Historical Existence of Jesus for Faith", 205.

²⁸ Troeltsch, "The Dogmatics of the 'Religionsgeschichtliche Schule' ", 12.

²⁹ Ibid., 10.

³⁰ Karl Barth, *Theology and the Church* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 61.

“Is it possible”, Barth asks “for an historian to do justice to Christianity?”³¹ Barth rejected, as did Troeltsch, the attempt to separate academic theology from the life of the Church. But for Barth this rejection first emerges from the context of the Church, from his efforts as pastor *not* as professor. And what makes the separation intolerable for Barth is *not* that Church teaching fails to understand the historically relative character of its symbols and constructs. Rather it is that theology at the universities fails to understand that no human method, historical-critical or otherwise, no matter how scientific, can uncover or construct God.

This point is illustrated in an essay Barth wrote during the last days he spent in Marburg as editor of *Die Christliche Welt*.³² The essay is entitled “Modern Theology and Work for the Kingdom of God”. It was occasioned by a recent discussion amongst students as to why so few graduates of the more “modern” theological faculties were applying for foreign missions. Barth’s thesis was that students from the more modern faculties of Marburg and Heidelberg found it “incomparably more difficult” to make the transition into pastoral activity than it was for students from more conservative places like Halle and Greifswald.³³ The reason for this was that conservative students, when called upon to testify to their faith, had at their disposal a whole host of authoritative doctrines which they could with good conscience set forth as normative statements of faith. The “modern” theological student had no such normative statements – the reason for this lay in the very nature of the modern understanding of religious life.

For Barth then, the problem of humanity’s relationship to God and the role religion plays in this became ultimately a struggle for hope. “[W]e are Christians! Our nation is a Christian nation!” he wrote in 1916; “A wonderful illusion . . . , a self-deception! We should above all be honest and ask ourselves far more frankly what we really gain from religion. . . . Are we hoping that something may happen?”³⁴ Unlike Troeltsch, the young Barth drew closer to the Reformers and to

³¹ Ibid.

³² Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development, 1909-1936* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 68.

³³ Ibid., 69.

³⁴ Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, trans. Douglas Horton (London: Hodder and Stoughton Limited, 1928), 20.

the theology of the crucified Christ.

Barth's theological approach to the topic of religion at this point in his career is demonstrated in "Modern Theology and Work for the Kingdom of God" where he addresses, in the characteristic modalities of liberal Protestantism, the "History of Religions" approach to biblical interpretation.³⁵ However, DiNoia posits that Barth could hardly be described as having a *theory* of religion before 1922, since the topic, strictly speaking, was not of his own choosing.³⁶ During this early period, Barth speaks to the important role religion plays in the thought of his theological opponents. It is in the course of arguing against opponents such as Troeltsch that Barth finds himself drawn into the modern discussion of religion.

The Romans Commentaries

While the 1919 and 1922 editions of Barth's commentary on the Epistle to Romans mark a decisive shift away from liberal Protestantism, they nonetheless continue to reflect Barth's concern with what he will eventually call in his mature treatment of these issues "The Problem of Religion in Theology".³⁷

In the first edition of Barth's *Römerbrief*, references to religion "appear frequently in the text, typically in parallel with morality (*Religion und Moral* is a constantly recurring phrase), and nearly always in negative contrast to the gospel".³⁸ The incapacity of human morality and religiosity to attain salvation echoes Barth's interest in Ludwig Feuerbach, whom he saw as a support in his assault on nineteenth century theology.³⁹

³⁵ See McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 68-70.

³⁶ Di Noia, "Religion and the Religions", 245.

³⁷ *CD* I/2, 280-97.

³⁸ Garrett Green, "Challenging the Religious Studies Canon: Karl Barth's Theology of Religion", *The Journal of Religion*, 75 (October 1995), 475. See also Garrett Green, *Karl Barth on Religion: The Revelation of God as the Sublimation of Religion* (London: T & T Clark, 2007), 7. See also Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief* (Bern: Bei G. A. Bäschlen, 1919; unveränderter Nachdruck der ersten Auflage von 1919, Zürich: EVZ, 1963).

³⁹ Barth maintained that Feuerbach, since he denied the word "God" and its cognates could be predicated of anything except man, believed he was following through to their logical conclusion the philosophical and theological syntheses of Hegel and Schleiermacher respectively. Barth writes: "We saw that its [theology's] whole problem had become how to make religion, revelation and the relationship with God something which could also be understood as a necessary predicate of man To Feuerbach at all events the meaning of the question is whether the theologian, when he thus formulates the problem, is not after all affirming the thing in which the assent of humanity seems to

According to Garrett Green *religion* is a favourite but non-technical term in the first edition of Barth's Romans commentary. In the second edition of 1922 it becomes a structural element, associated from time to time with the concept of "law".⁴⁰ By doing this, Barth affirms that religion, comparable to the law, remains good, just and holy, though religion can bring forth awareness of sin but not justification.⁴¹

The revised edition of the *Römerbrief* additionally bears the marks of Barth's exposure to existentialist ideas, especially through his reading of Søren Kierkegaard.⁴² Here Barth conceives of religion as the limit or frontier of human existence, where humanity meets "an inexorable and predetermined 'either-or.'"⁴³ It is not simply that religion exposes the limited quality of human existence; rather, religion *is* that limit, it is "the last human possibility".⁴⁴

Grace however, is not another possibility. Grace is the impossibility which is possible only in God, and which is unencumbered and untouched by the final possibility, the ambiguity of religion: *The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*⁴⁵

In a similar way to theologians of the nineteenth century, "Barth identifies the essentially human with the essentially religious. But unlike those theologians, he characterizes it in dialectical, even contradictory, terms."⁴⁶ Religion, Barth writes,

culminate . . . , namely man's apotheosis." See Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century: Its Background and History* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1973), 537.

⁴⁰ Green, "Challenging the Religious Studies Canon: Karl Barth's Theology of Religion", 475. (See also Green, *Karl Barth on Religion: The Revelation of God as the Sublimation of Religion*, 8).

⁴¹ Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. from the sixth edition by Edwyn C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 242, 254-5.

⁴² For Kierkegaard the infinite qualitative difference between God and humanity is due to sin. Barth's reassertion of this difference puts a halt to any talk of God which proceeds from humanity upwards to God and hence this difference is a major presupposition of Barth's critique of nineteenth century theology. While Barth's position is a reformulation of Kierkegaard's, it is also a return to the Reformation teaching on humanity. See Philip Almond, "Karl Barth and Anthropocentric Theology", *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 31.5 (1978), 439.

⁴³ Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 229.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 231.

⁴⁶ Green, "Challenging the Religious Studies Canon: Karl Barth's Theology of Religion", 476. (See also Green, *Karl Barth on Religion: The Revelation of God as the Sublimation of Religion*, 8-9).

echoing Marx, is like a skillfully administered drug, and the “well-balanced, mature man” – the man of law and religion- is essentially godless man: “With acute analysis Feuerbach has penetrated the truth when he points out that sinful passions are clearly seen, awakened and set in motion, with the intrusion of the possibility of religion, and because of it”.⁴⁷ This is a crucial statement of Barth’s indebtedness to Feuerbach’s critique of religion, meeting what Barth saw to be the great pretence of nineteenth century theology.

However, religion is recapitulated in the law. Religious persons, seeing that the law is not sin but spiritual, realize that it is themselves who are in bondage and that no form of religion can deliver them from this spiritual condition. The conflict of Paul’s famous “Ego” (Romans 7:14-15) is a confrontation of Friedrich Schleiermacher’s “apprehension of the absolute – feeling and taste for eternity”.⁴⁸ I come to know that “sin dwelleth in me”, and that the oneness of God’s holiness and mercy is the problem of *my* existence. Religious experience bears witness to the fact that sin is all: “A man at one with himself is a man still unacquainted with the great problem of his union with God.”⁴⁹

Nowhere however, is the existentialism of the early Barth more evident than in the close association of religion with death:

Religion, though it come disguised as the most intimate friend of men, be they Greeks or barbarians, is nevertheless the adversary. Religion is the KRISIS of culture and of barbarism. Apart from God, it is the most dangerous enemy a man has on this side of the grave. For religion is the human possibility of remembering that we must die: it

⁴⁷ Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 236.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 260.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 266. Barth contends that while Schleiermacher had attempted to give religion a place of its own separate from ethics and metaphysics, nevertheless what Schleiermacher said of God had its foundation in the facts of the pious Christian self-consciousness. For Schleiermacher, God was revealed through humanity’s immediate sensuous experience of the aesthetic unity of nature. Barth does admit that Schleiermacher had tried to give the objective and the historical its due, and in particular the fact of Jesus Christ. Barth states: “There can be no doubt about the personal sincerity of this assertion. But it is just this which is in question – whether this assertion can be considered as objectively valid, whether the strength of this assertion can be some other strength beside that of the asserting believer himself . . . Schleiermacher does not seem to be able to say that there is an external significance of Christ, an absoluteness of Christianity.” For Barth, there is no ultimate opposition in the writings of Schleiermacher between God and humanity; no essential distinction between Christ and the Christian. See Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, 471.

is the place where . . . the intolerable question is clearly formulated –
Who then art thou?⁵⁰

Although Barth will later reject the kind of existential anthropology presented here so dramatically, nothing he says here about religion is incompatible with his later views.⁵¹

*The First Dogmatic Effort*⁵²

In the first of a projected series entitled *Prolegomena to Christian Dogmatics*, begun in 1927 and later abandoned for a new approach, Barth devotes a section to “Grace and Religion” (*Die Gnade und die Religion*).⁵³ Against J. G. Fichte’s philosophy of “the experiencing self”, Barth “hurled the scandal of Christian preaching, which he called the ‘hazard’ of human effort, and an act wholly dependent upon grace. Likewise, against the school of Schleiermacher, Barth stressed proclamation rather than ‘religious feeling’ as the object of theology”⁵⁴ The core of this dogmatic effort remains substantially unchanged throughout the later *Church Dogmatics*:

The basic reality of a possibility of the human soul for religion consists in the purest sense in the awe before the wholly other, to whose superiority and help, on the basis of a powerful experience over against himself, and all that he otherwise knows, man entrusts himself. This actually as such is not the subjective possibility of revelation, but the powerful expression of the opposition of man against God with himself. If there is to be a common interest (*Gemeinschaft*), with

⁵⁰ Ibid., 268.

⁵¹ Hans Urs von Balthasar maintains that there were two critical turning points in Barth’s life: “The first was the turning from liberalism to Christian radicalism, which occurred during the First World War and received its expression in *The Epistle to the Romans*. The second was his final emancipation from the shackles of philosophy, enabling him finally to arrive at a genuine, self-authenticating theology.” See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth: exposition and response*, trans. Edward T. Oakes S. J. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 93. For a critical response to this work see McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*.

⁵² I rely here upon Cark F. Starkloff’s translation of Barth’s *Die Lehre vom Worte Gottes: Prolegomena zur christlichen Dogmatik* (1927), in his article “Karl Barth on Religion: A Study for Christians in Mission”, *Missiology*, 6.4 (October 1978), 449-450. Almond contends that Barth’s second turning point occurs in the *Prolegomena to Christian Dogmatics*, as it is here that he endeavours to eliminate all the hidden roots of philosophy from theology. See Almond, “Karl Barth and Anthropocentric Theology”, 441.

⁵³ Karl Barth, *Die Lehre vom Worte Gottes: Prolegomena zur christlichen Dogmatik* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1927), 310.

⁵⁴ Starkloff, “Karl Barth on Religion: A Study for Christians in Mission”, 449.

God, then it is not so in itself but through the grace of God, which grasps it as faith and obedience.⁵⁵

Barth recognizes Rudolf Otto's study of religion as an *a priori* of the human consciousness, and as a human phenomenon he places it alongside politics, science and art. He turns this phenomenon of awe before the Holy into an assault on liberal Protestantism – “that ‘shameful confession’ with its propensity to substitute words like ‘religion’ and ‘piety’ for faith and obedience”.⁵⁶ Barth's progress towards a definition of religion finally arrives at the words of Goethe: “In our breast there surges forth a pure aspiration freely and gratefully to devote ourselves to a higher, purer, unknown, explaining itself by the eternally nameless. This is what we call piety (*Frommsein*).”⁵⁷ Such a striving is indeed within humanity's capabilities; humanity can be holy and can have religion. What humanity cannot have in all of this is a correlative to the Word of God – a claim made for religious experience by liberal Protestantism. Whereas liberals hold religious experience to be the subjective possibility of receiving the Word of God, Barth places the possibility solely and entirely in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Carl Starkloff contends that Barth's warfare in the *Prolegomena* is against the effort to tame God, to make God an object among other objects:

The God of Schleiermacher is a product of human religion; He does not stand personally over against humanity. Religion is thus a personal power (*Eigenmacht*) before God, and not the admission of weakness (*Ohnmacht*) of Christian faith. God becomes a predicate of human life and activity. However, Barth adds, religion may be transformed by the power of grace, and become acceptable as faith and obedience, where presumed reverence before the Almighty becomes actual reverence. Religion lived out in obedience can be, not the service of idols (*Götzendienst*) but service of God (*Gottesdienst*). In faith, the dialectic becomes analogy (which in turn becomes dialectic); religious experience under obedience can correspond to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Barth, *Die Lehre vom Worte Gottes: Prolegomena zur christlichen Dogmatik*, 301-2 as translated by Starkloff, “Barth on Religion: A Study for Christians in Mission”, 450.

⁵⁶ Starkloff, “Barth on Religion: A Study for Christians in Mission”, 450.

⁵⁷ Barth, *Die Lehre vom Worte Gottes: Prolegomena zur christlichen Dogmatik*, 305 as translated by Starkloff, “Barth on Religion: A Study for Christians in Mission”, 450.

⁵⁸ Starkloff, “Barth on Religion: A Study for Christians in Mission”, 450.

§17 of *The Church Dogmatics*

Volume one of the *Church Dogmatics* is entitled *The Doctrine of the Word of God*. This theological introduction to the Word of God is the context for Barth's most developed treatment of religion, comprising the entirety of §17.⁵⁹ The thesis statement contains Barth's formal *theological* definition of religion:

The revelation of God in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is the judging but also reconciling presence of God in the world of human religion, that is, in the realm of man's attempts to justify and to sanctify himself before a capricious and arbitrary picture of God. The Church is the locus of true religion, so far as through grace it lives grace.⁶⁰

This theological interpretation of religion takes place under the heading *Gottes Offenbarung als Aufhebung der Religion*, which the translators of the *Church Dogmatics* have rendered "The Revelation of God as the Abolition of Religion".⁶¹ His theory of religion is structured in three "dialectical 'moments' ".⁶²

1. The Problem of Religion in Theology
2. Religion as Unbelief
3. True Religion.

The Problem of Religion in Theology

Barth begins his treatment of religion by telling the "sad story"⁶³ of the gradual emergence of religion as an independently known quantity alongside revelation to the point where "religion has not to be understood in the light of revelation, but revelation in the light of religion".⁶⁴ This modern Christian heresy, which he dubs

⁵⁹ CD I/2, 280-361.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 280.

⁶¹ Green argues that "the mistranslation of the crucial term *Aufhebung* as 'Abolition' has played a major role in encouraging the caricatures of Barth's theology that have for so long distorted its reception in the Anglo-Saxon world". He contends that "Barth has borrowed a favourite term of Hegel's and put it to his own use. He shares with Hegel the conviction that the truth can only be told by saying both no and yes; and he finds in the unique ambiguity of the verb *aufheben* a way of articulating their dialectical interrelationship." Hence Green employs the etymologically equivalent terms "sublate" and "sublation" for "abolition". See Green, 'Challenging the Religious Studies Canon: Karl Barth's Theory of Religion', 477.

⁶² Ibid., 477. See also Green, *Religion: The Revelation of God as the Sublimation of Religion*, 12.

⁶³ CD I/2, 290.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 291.

“religionism”, poses the problem to which the first subsection of § 17 is devoted.⁶⁵

Revelation, the subject matter of theology, “has at least the aspect and character of a human phenomenon. It is something which may be grasped historically and psychologically.”⁶⁶ Because “[w]e can inquire into its nature and structure and value as we can in the case of all others”, this unavoidably leads to the problem of human religion.⁶⁷ Green contends that Barth is in agreement here with the secular theorists of his day, “emphasizing that religion is to be studied historically and comparatively”.⁶⁸ In fact, Barth permits the relativizing of Christianity among the religions of the world on theological grounds. This is because religions, for Barth, are “one specific area of human competence, experience and activity . . . one of the worlds within the world of men”.⁶⁹ They are human activities, human constructions. In this way so is Christianity:

. . . we would have to deny revelation as such if we tried to deny that it is also Christianity, that it has this human aspect, that from this standpoint it can be compared with other human things, that from this standpoint it is singular but certainly not unique.⁷⁰

Because revelation assumes the historical and social form of religion, “theologians run the risk of misconstruing the *relationship* of revelation and religion, a risk to which they have in fact succumbed by reversing the proper priority. . . . The problem is not that modern theology has attributed a religious character to revelation but rather that it has made religion into the criterion of revelation rather than the other way around.”⁷¹ The theological task at hand is therefore to establish the priority of revelation over religion without denying the religious nature of revelation. Barth’s alternative to Neo-Protestant “religionism”⁷² is “to recount the history of the relationships” between God and humanity, revelation and religion.⁷³

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 281.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Green, “Challenging the Religious Studies Canon: Karl Barth’s Theology of Religion”, 479. (See also Green, *Karl Barth on Religion: The Revelation of God as the Sublimation of Religion*, 13).

⁶⁹ CD I/2, 281.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Green, “Challenging the Religious Studies Canon: Karl Barth’s Theology of Religion”, 479. (See also Green, *Karl Barth on Religion: The Revelation of God as the Sublimation of Religion*, 14).

⁷² CD I/2, 291.

⁷³ Ibid., 296.

Hence, the appropriate analogy for relating religion and revelation is the incarnation of Christ: "It is because we remember and apply the Christological doctrine of the *assumptio carnis* that we speak of revelation as the abolition of religion."⁷⁴

Religion as Unbelief

Given that religion is an exclusively human effort to know God, Barth argues, it is "unbelief".⁷⁵ The fallenness of human religion is unbelief, consisting not primarily in a simple ignorance of God's revelation, but in an active rejection of it through the proud attempt to make oneself the subject in the divine-human relationship in place of God:

If man tries to grasp at truth of himself, he tries to grasp at it *a priori*. But in that case he does not do what he has to do when the truth comes to him. He does not believe. If he did, he would listen; but in religion, he talks. If he did, he would accept a gift; but in religion he takes something for himself. If he did, he would let God Himself intercede for God; but in religion he ventures to grasp at God. Because it is grasping, religion is the contradiction of revelation, the concentrated expression of human unbelief, i.e., an attitude and activity which is directly opposed to faith.⁷⁶

Religion is therefore anthropocentric by definition; whereas revelation is theocentric. Religion is a human activity; whereas revelation is God's unconditioned action towards humanity.

Barth's judgment against religion is not in any way an attempt to construe Christianity as inherently superior to other religions. He refuses to establish a hierarchy among religions *qua* human activities – as human, they are all inevitably unbelief. Insofar as Christianity is a *human* activity, a *human* response to God's free grace in Jesus Christ, it too falls under the judgment against religion.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Ibid., 297.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 299.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 302.

⁷⁷ In *CD I/1* Barth asks: "Can this acknowledgment of God's Word be differentiated even from the phenomenon of what are called 'other religions' with any clear distinctiveness of individuality? To the degree that it has its reality in this human acknowledgment, does not Christianity undeniably belong to the sphere of general religious history in which there are no doubt hills and valleys but no heaven?" (*CD I/1*, 217).

True Religion

In Christianity, humans act, but in revelation, God acts. Barth laments that “all this Christianity of ours, and the details of it, are not as such what they ought to be and pretend to be, a work of faith, and therefore of obedience to the divine revelation”.⁷⁸ Christianity, as a human activity, can claim no superiority vis-à-vis other religions on the basis of any characteristics inherent in it: “. . . we can speak of ‘true’ religion only in the sense in which we speak of a ‘justified sinner’ ”.⁷⁹ While “[n]o religion is true” it can *become* true “according to that which it purports to be and for which it is upheld. And it can become true only in the way in which man is justified, from without . . . ”.⁸⁰ In a nutshell: “Like justified man, religion is a creature of grace.”⁸¹ Green correctly believes that this is “the climax to Barth’s entire argument of §17, the linchpin of his theological theory of religion”.⁸² Barth writes: “There is a true religion: just as there are justified sinners. If we abide strictly by that analogy . . . we need have no hesitation in saying that the Christian religion is the true religion.”⁸³

Unlike the History of Religions School, Barth is not proposing an apologetic that portrays Christianity as the apex of religion, “the culmination of a historical or evolutionary process”.⁸⁴ All such apologetics are undialectical because they fail to apply divine judgment to Christianity. “The religion of revelation is indeed bound up with the revelation of God”, he writes, “but the revelation of God is not bound up with the religion of revelation.”⁸⁵ Barth makes no claim for “the superiority of Christianity on historical, philosophical, phenomenological, comparative – or any other nontheological – grounds”.⁸⁶ The truth of Christian religion comes from the free grace of God rather than from any qualities inherent in Christianity *qua* human activity: “The Christian religion is the true one only as we listen to the divine

⁷⁸ CD I/2, 327.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 325.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid., 326.

⁸² Green, “Challenging the Religious Studies Canon: Karl Barth’s Theology of Religion”, 482. (See also Green, *Karl Barth on Religion: The Revelation of God as the Sublimation of Religion*, 20).

⁸³ CD I/2, 326.

⁸⁴ Green, “Challenging the Religious Studies Canon: Karl Barth’s Theology of Religion”, 482. (See also Green, *Karl Barth on Religion: The Revelation of God as the Sublimation of Religion*, 20).

⁸⁵ CD I/2, 329.

⁸⁶ Green, “Challenging the Religious Studies Canon: Karl Barth’s Theology of Religion”, 482. (See also Green, *Karl Barth on Religion: The Revelation of God as the Sublimation of Religion*, 21).

revelation”.⁸⁷

Revelation is God’s offering of free grace. But “grace” is not an abstract category describing a particular class of events. Barth takes care to insist that “the Christian-Protestant religion of grace is not the true religion because it is a religion of grace”. If that were the case, he asks, then “why should we not say it of a whole range of other religions, for which grace in different names and contexts is not a wholly foreign entity?”⁸⁸ Barth offers Pure Land Buddhism (Jodo Shinshu) as an example of another potential “religion of grace” which he calls the “most adequate and comprehensive and illuminating heathen parallel to Christianity”, and specifically to “Reformed Christianity”.⁸⁹ He concludes that despite their remarkable parallels to Reformation Christianity, the Yodo-Shin and Yodo-Shin-Shu movements of twelfth- and thirteenth-century Japan do not qualify theologically as true religions. Their very similarity to Protestant Christianity makes it all the more evident that “[o]nly one thing is really decisive for the distinction of truth and error. ... That one thing is the name of Jesus Christ.”⁹⁰ Jesus Christ is “the reality of the grace itself by which one religion is adopted and distinguished as the true one before all others”, God’s grace made concrete, visible, knowable.⁹¹

The name of Jesus Christ, according to Barth, “is the very essence and source of all reality”.⁹² This axiom applies to Christianity as a religion: one is justified in speaking of Christianity as the one true religion only insofar as it has its source solely in Jesus Christ. Christianity becomes the one true religion in “an act of divine creation”.⁹³ Christianity is “taken up” into Jesus Christ. “The Christian religion”, Barth asserts, “is simply the earthly-historical life of the Church and the children of God.” As such it is only an “annexe to the human nature of Jesus Christ”.⁹⁴ Christianity does not occupy a position of superiority on its own merits but is dependent solely on the free, electing grace of God in Jesus Christ. It is thus “the

⁸⁷ *CD* I/2, 326

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 343.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 340.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 343.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 339.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 348.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 346.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 348.

sacramental area created by the Holy Spirit, in which the God whose Word became flesh continues to speak through the sign of His revelation".⁹⁵

An evaluation of the concept of religion in the early work of Barth

From a very early time Barth's theology was identified as a " 'corrective theology' (Theologie des Korrektivs)".⁹⁶ While Barth himself was disinclined to own this label there is little doubt that he consciously strove to carry out a corrective role. He endorsed, for example, the statement of one of Friedrich Schleiermacher's commentators that Schleiermacher's "achievement as a whole is so great, that the only threat to it would be a corresponding counter achievement, not a cavilling criticism of detail".⁹⁷ Barth's polemics against religion and, indeed, his whole theological approach represent just such a counter achievement. Hence the criticisms of religion which one encounters in his early writings must be viewed within their historical context as attempts to counter the nineteenth-century emphasis on religion.

"Religion" in its classic treatment in paragraph 17 of *Church Dogmatics* is merely a formal category. It serves as the backdrop against which a positive understanding of revelation – Barth's primary concern – may be projected. Starkloff views Barth's critique of religion as "polemic against, not so much the 'non-Christian religions' as the various anthropocentrisms of writers like Fichte, Schleiermacher, Hegel, Troeltsch, Ritschl, and finally Tillich, Bultmann and even Barth's old friend Emil Brunner".⁹⁸ Barth himself confirms this opinion when he states in his discussion of religion that "the discussion cannot be understood as a preliminary polemic against the non-Christian religions, with a view to the ultimate assertion that the Christian religion is the true religion".⁹⁹ Barth, unlike many of his nineteenth-century predecessors, saw the problem of the relationship between Christianity and the other religions as but one of a number of issues on the agenda of the theologian with which he personally did not have time to deal. Consequently he offered no specific theology of religions, developing instead a theology of religion. This means that any perspective Barth might have on the religions has to be

⁹⁵ Ibid., 359.

⁹⁶ Karl Barth, *The Word of God and The Word of Man*, 103.

⁹⁷ Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, 427, quoting H. Scholz, *Christentum und Wissenschaft in Schleiermachers Glaubenslehre* (1911), 201.

⁹⁸ Starkloff, "Karl Barth on Religion: A study for Christians in Mission", 444.

⁹⁹ CD 1/2, 326.

extrapolated from his understanding of religion as a category as well as his treatment of other topics. It is possible to assume therefore that the enormity and complexity of this task accounts for the preponderance of inadequate assessments of Barth on this matter and the ill-founded charge that Barth represents “the most extreme form of the exclusivist theory”.¹⁰⁰

A refutation of the charge that Barth is solely an exclusivist

To be sure, the exclusivist tones of Barth’s work cannot be ignored. But because Christianity is a religion and therefore a human construction, it stands, like all other religions, under the judgment of God’s Word. Any truth present in Christian proclamation is not due to any inherent qualities on the part of Christians, but solely to God’s free, electing grace in Jesus Christ. The ultimate distinction between Christianity and the other religions lies emphatically “in the name of Jesus Christ in whom the Christian religion is created, elected, justified, and sanctified”.¹⁰¹ As Tom Greggs comments:

The ultimate and unshakeable distinction between religions and the “true religion” can be seen “only in Him, in the name of Jesus Christ, i.e., in the revelation and reconciliation achieved in Jesus Christ. Nowhere else, but genuinely so in Him.” For Barth, this revelation and reconciliation are inseparable: reconciliation is the content of revelation, and revelation the only direct and overt means by which reconciliation may be known (albeit there may be incognito forms). Both revelation and reconciliation are identical with the person (“the name”) of Jesus Christ. They are, thus, an event (a history) before they are a body of ideas. In this event, the Jesus Christ of history who lived and died for us in the first century CE in Palestine is present and effectual in the here and now.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 11. In an interesting article entitled *The Impossibility of a Pluralist View of Religions*, Gavin D’Costa argues that the logical impossibility of a pluralist view of religions means that Race’s typology of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism as three approaches or paradigms regarding Christianity’s view of other religions is untenable. He argues that pluralism is in fact another form of exclusivism as, in its various forms, it holds to exclusivistic criteria. Hence, the differentiation between the two does not really seem to be an objective distinction “except in so much as it indicates that usually those called pluralists are exclusivists without knowing it, they are (as later day inclusivists might say) anonymous exclusivists!” This thesis, in concert with D’Costa’s view of pluralism, accepts only the two paradigms of exclusivism and inclusivism as valid alternatives with reference to this discussion of Barth’s theology in relation to non-Christian religions. See Gavin D’Costa, “The Impossibility of a Pluralist View of Religions”, *Religious Studies*, 32 (1996), 223-32.

¹⁰¹ Tom Greggs, “Bringing Barth’s critique of religion to the inter-faith table”, unpublished paper (Forthcoming in the *Journal of Religion* (January 2008)).

¹⁰² Ibid.

Barth's Christological and revelational exclusivism is, then, in George Hunsinger's words, "exclusivism without triumphalism".¹⁰³ But this has to be held in dialectical tension with Barth's recognition of the inclusive nature of the category of "religion". The Christian religion is "a species within a genus in which there are many other species".¹⁰⁴ Like all the other species of religion, Christianity stands under the critique of religion as *Unglaube* (faithlessness). But because it stands under this judgment above all others, it cannot engage in heightening its position through the judgment of revelation over and against them; instead, "it is our business as Christians to apply this judgment first and most acutely to ourselves: and to others, the non-Christians, only in so far as we recognise ourselves in them".¹⁰⁵ There is the clear assertion then that the understanding of Christianity as the "true religion" can never be used "as preliminary polemic against the non-Christian".¹⁰⁶ As Greggs suggests:

Standing most sharply judged under this thesis, the Christian cannot come to the inter-faith table with any sense of a privileged position, nor even as an equal, but only as one who is the most guilty of idolatry and self-righteousness even in the quest to purge herself of these things. The Christian's solidarity with the other is never as *primus inter pares*, but only as a member of the religion to whom God's "No" is most sharply spoken in the search and quest for God. It is this sharpest "No" spoken to the Christian Church with which Barth is concerned – never an intolerant attitude towards other faiths, or an unloving one towards members of those faiths.¹⁰⁷

There is therefore an inherent recognition of the other in Barth's understanding of religion. But Greggs is right to suggest that this does not necessarily lead to naive pluralism. It implies rather that "the Christian religion stands in solidarity with other religions".¹⁰⁸ With solidarity "one must be truly concerned with other religions" despite difference.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰³ Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, 280.

¹⁰⁴ *CD I/2*, 281.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 327.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 326.

¹⁰⁷ Greggs, "Bringing Barth's critique of religion to the inter-faith table".

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

Barth's belief that "humanity is cohumanity" lends support to Gregg's claim.¹¹⁰ All human beings are the creation of God. Since the created world has "its place, its existence, its structure, its endurance" from God's revelation in Christ,¹¹¹ Robert Jenson contends that it follows that the human being "is being which originates in the event of its rescue from perversion and its exaltation into fulfilment in the existence of Jesus Christ".¹¹² The human creature has his or her reality in being the covenant-partner of God.¹¹³ William Werpehowski comments that what Barth means by this is that creaturely freedom is freedom for the good of a history of relationship with God. But this inherently means living with other humans in fellowship: "[the] 'properly and essentially' human is never expressed in lonely isolation, in which one would seek to find fulfilment in neutrality or hostility toward one's fellows".¹¹⁴ By contrast, "the normatively human is rather a being-in-encounter in which one's distinctive life is qualified by and fulfilled in connection with the life of the other".¹¹⁵ Thus all activities are *human* insofar as they are realized in relationship:

Thus the fact that I am born and die; that I eat and drink and sleep; that I develop and maintain myself; that beyond this I assert myself in face of others, and even physically propagate my species; that I enjoy and work and play and fashion and possess; that I acquire and have and exercise powers; that I take part in all the works of the race either accomplished or in process of accomplishment; that in all this I satisfy religious needs and can realize religious possibilities; and that in it all I fulfil my aptitudes as an understanding and thinking, willing and feeling being – all this as such is not my humanity. In it I can be either human or inhuman. . . . There is no reason why in the realization of my vital, natural and intellectual aptitudes and potentialities, in my life-act as such, and my participation in scholarship and art, politics and economics, civilization and culture, I should not actualize and reveal that "I am as Thou art."¹¹⁶

Barth describes the constituents of this form of creaturely covenant as "free communication": a "living relationship between one man and his neighbour,

¹¹⁰ CD III/2, 222-85.

¹¹¹ CD IV/3, 386.

¹¹² Robert Jenson, *Alpha and Omega* (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1963), 98.

¹¹³ CD III/2, 203-324.

¹¹⁴ William Werpehowski, "Justification and Justice in the Theology of Karl Barth", *Thomist*, 50.4 (October, 1986), 633.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ CD III/2, 249.

between 'I' and 'Thou', between man and woman".¹¹⁷ A "[h]uman being is being with others".¹¹⁸ Humans are human because they live together, see and hear each other, speak to each other, and assist one another freely.¹¹⁹ What this implies for Werpehowski is mutual interdependence:

The mutuality of speech and hearing requires that each party try to interpret him or herself to the other, in order for both to discover and specify a relevant and presumed common sphere of life and interest. The discovery of this intersubjective space is directed toward assistance, in which each party helps and is helped by the other from within the shared space. One acts not from one's isolated point of view, nor from the associate's perspective, but from a third point of view, a perspective from which one's own good and the other's good are equally in play.¹²⁰

Barth suggests that this relationship should be enacted with gladness.¹²¹ This is because "[h]umanity lives and moves and has its being in this freedom to be oneself with the other, and oneself to be with the other".¹²² For Barth, "individual" and "community" are not separate and potentially antagonistic; to commend the one includes commendation of the other. Since all act within the grace of creation, this freedom is a possibility for Christians and non-Christians alike.

It is this freedom that permits one to recognise one's own uniqueness as a Christian while also recognising and respecting one's relationship to the non-Christian, the religious other: a relationship founded on mutual interdependence. Here lies potential for inter-religious encounter.

But the question arises: in what sense are Christians and non-Christians different from each other? Barth contends that "a Christian, unlike others, *knows something*".¹²³ What a Christian *knows* is the truth of Jesus Christ: therefore "[i]t is

¹¹⁷ Karl Barth, "The Christian Message and the New Humanism", in *Against the Stream*, ed. R. G. Smith, trans. E. M. Delacour and Stanley Godman (London: SCM, 1954), 187.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 188.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ Werpehowski, "Justification and Justice in the Theology of Karl Barth", 633-4.

¹²¹ *CD III/2*, 267. Cf. Helmut Gollwitzer, *An Introduction to Protestant Theology*, trans. David Cairns (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 98-101.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 272.

¹²³ Karl Barth, *Karl Barth's Table Talk*, ed. John D. Godsey (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1963), 88.

from looking to Jesus Christ that Christian[s] . . . must derive any true knowledge of what it means to be human”.¹²⁴ Barth writes:

The nature of the man Jesus alone is the key to the problem of human nature. This man is man. As certainly as God’s relation to sinful man is properly and primarily His relation to this man alone, and a relation to the rest of mankind only in Him and through Him, He alone is primarily and properly man.¹²⁵

Humanity has genuine knowledge of human nature only through Jesus Christ; this is because “the ontological determination of humanity is grounded in the fact that one man among all others is the man Jesus”.¹²⁶ Because of this Barth is able to say that “to be a man is to be with God”, for “[m]an is with God because he is with Jesus”.¹²⁷ This, in turn, means that: “Godlessness is not, therefore, a possibility, but an ontological impossibility for man”, and “sin itself is not a possibility, but an ontological impossibility for man”.¹²⁸

This theme is elucidated in *Christ and Adam*.¹²⁹ The essence of this exposition of Romans 5 is simply that “[o]ur relationship to Christ has an essential priority and superiority over our relationship to Adam”.¹³⁰ With respect to election Barth interprets Paul as having meant that “[t]he righteous decision of God has fallen upon men not in Adam but in Christ”.¹³¹ Of anthropology, in relation to the fall, Barth states: “to find the true and essential nature of man we have to look not to Adam the fallen man, but to Christ in whom what is fallen has been cancelled and what was original has been restored”.¹³² A few pages before, he argues: “We have really seen that on both sides [in both Jesus Christ and Adam] there is the formal identity of the one human nature which is not annulled or transformed even by

¹²⁴ William Stacy Johnson, *The Mystery of God: Karl Barth and the Postmodern Foundations of Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 79.

¹²⁵ CD, III/2, 43.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 132-3.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 135, 136.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 136.

¹²⁹ Karl Barth, *Christ and Adam: Man and Humanity in Romans 5*, trans. T. A. Smail (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1956).

¹³⁰ Ibid., 10.

¹³¹ Ibid., 7.

¹³² Ibid., 24.

sin”.¹³³ He concludes that “Jesus Christ is the secret truth about the essential nature of man, and even sinful man is still essentially related to Him”.¹³⁴ In the closing pages of this work Barth makes some claims which are directly related to the status of non-Christians:

The context is widened from Church history to World history, from Christ’s relationship to Christians to His relationship to all men. . . . What is said here [Romans 5:1-11] applies generally and universally, not merely to one limited group of men. . . . The fact of Christ is here presented as something that dominates and includes all men. The nature of Christ objectively conditions human nature and the work of Christ makes an objective difference to the life and destiny of all men.¹³⁵

Because of the universal and objective nature of Christ’s work there is no ontological difference between the Christian and the non-Christian, least of all a difference which is in some way dependent on religion, for:

Much in true human nature is unrelated to ‘religion’, but nothing in true human nature is unrelated to the Christian faith. That means that we can understand true human nature only in the light of the Christian gospel that we believe. For Christ stands above and is first, and Adam stands below and is second. Man’s nature in Adam is not, as is usually assumed, his true and original nature; it is only truly human at all in so far as it reflects and corresponds to essential human nature as it is found in Christ.¹³⁶

Barth sees the Christian as being different from the non-Christian more in terms of the former’s knowledge of the good news than of the latter’s inclusion in salvation. In *The Humanity of God* he describes those outside the Christian faith as

. . . really only “insiders” who have not yet understood and apprehended themselves as such. On the other hand, even the most persuaded Christian, in the final analysis, must and will recognise himself ever and again as an “outsider”. So there must then be no

¹³³ Ibid., 9.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 41.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 42.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 43.

particular language for insiders and outsiders. Both are contemporary men-of-the world – all of us are.¹³⁷

This point is reinforced in *Table Talk*:

The distinction is not between the redeemed and the non-redeemed, but between those who realise it and those who do not. The emphasis in much of today's preaching has to do with salvation in the future, something the preacher can help give, instead of speaking of the perfect salvation already accomplished. We only await its final revelation. The emphasis should be on the deed of God that is *done*. *Cognitio* means the *gnosis* of the *pistis*. Faith is a form of knowledge.¹³⁸

Barth understands the non-Christian to differ from the Christian only in being unaware of the objective facts of salvation: non-Christians are “unwitting witnesses” to the truth of the Gospel.¹³⁹ This is because Christianity is “taken up” into Jesus Christ as an “annexe” to his human nature.¹⁴⁰ Christian proclamation of the Gospel is true in part because the proclaimers are granted knowledge of that which they proclaim, i.e., they are granted the knowledge of the name of Jesus Christ – “the very essence and source of all reality”.¹⁴¹

But this gift given to Christians cannot be wielded as a weapon against others or clung to as a sign of one's superiority over non-Christians; rather, knowledge of the name of Jesus Christ should impel Christians to be more self-critical of their sinful attempts to control God's free revelation in Christ.

¹³⁷ Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God*, trans John Newton Thomas and Thomas Weiser (London: Collins, 1961), 58-9.

¹³⁸ Barth, *Table Talk*, 87.

¹³⁹ Hunsinger describes it in this manner: “The sovereign freedom of the Word is such that it can and does declare itself through unwitting witnesses in the secular sphere . . . Insofar as the one Word of God declares itself in this way, in the form of secular parables, it becomes clear that, despite all ambiguity, the real contextual whole in which these words participate is only apparently secular; in reality it is actually christocentric . . . [T]he sovereign freedom of the Word, with its ability to posit a periphery whose scope extends beyond the sphere of the Bible and Church, effectively opens up the possibility, nonetheless, of a progression from the Word to secular words”. See Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, 265. Chapter 3 will argue that the “secular sphere” is also meant to include non-Christian religions.

¹⁴⁰ CD I/2, 348.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

Moreover, Jesus Christ, who died for humanity in history, is present and effectual here and now, even *extra muros ecclesiae*:

As the reconciliation of the world to God, the justification and sanctification of man, is the reality, and indeed the living and present reality in Jesus Christ the true Witness of its truth . . . not only *intra* but *extra muros ecclesiae* there are also lights in the darkness, clarities in confusion, constants in the oscillating dialectic of our existence, orders in disorder, certainties in the great sea of doubt, genuine speaking and hearing even in the labyrinth of human speech. They are all very wonderful and unexpected and unforeseen.¹⁴²

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that there seems to be a radical inclusivity to Barth's Christological and revelational exclusivity which indicates recognition, solidarity and concern for the religious other. This clearly allows for the possibility of Christian co-existence with religious others in a pluralist context. In light of this, most previous judgments about the implications of Barth's theology for inter-religious encounter must be challenged. Barth recognises that the non-Christian (including the religious other) differs from the Christian only in being unaware of the objective facts of salvation. This difference is therefore a *noetic* rather than an *ontic* one. However, as has been hinted in this chapter, even this difference in knowledge is a relative one, for in Barth's discussion of "secular parables of the kingdom" in the fourth volume of the *Dogmatics*, he indicates that there is much in the *secular* world which is both true and edifying for the Church. More will be said of this later. In the meantime, however, the findings of this chapter provide a basis on which to build a constructive proposal for an encounter with religious others, in particular Muslims. Chapter 2 will continue to investigate this by examining Barth's understanding of Islam historically, politically and theologically, finally focusing on the central importance of his theology of Israel in this respect.

¹⁴² CD IV/3, 476.

CHAPTER 2

Barth's understanding of Islam historically, politically and theologically, and the central importance of his theology of Israel

Introduction

This chapter will argue that Barth comments briefly, sporadically and polemically on Islam as a false religion. He views it as a threat to Christendom, using it as a cipher for National Socialism, as an example of absolute monotheism, and finally as a “paganised” form of rabbinic Judaism. An examination and critique of Barth's understanding of Judaism, which is central to his understanding of Islam, recognises the interdependency of Church and Synagogue for Barth. As this chapter will demonstrate, this mutual dependency should also be extended to include Islam.

The Religions

As has been argued in Chapter 1, Barth's theology does not give particular attention to the religions of the world. There are only a few passages in his *Church Dogmatics* and other writings where he is explicitly concerned with other religions. Most impressive in this regard is his dialogue with Buddhism.¹ Otherwise, however, the religions only appear in a rather general way. When Barth does speak of them, he usually does so in the context of his examination of the understanding of ‘religion’, a term which really does not have the religions of the world primarily and concretely in view. Indeed, §17 reserves the term ‘revelation’ solely for revelation in Christ. It denotes God's own self-disclosure as this is understood in Christian faith. In contrast to this, religion, and along with it the religions, represent only human “reality and possibility”.²

¹ Cf. *CD I/2*, 340-4. Responding to a letter by the philosopher-theologian Katsumi Takizawa in 1937, when the text of *CD I/2* was almost ready for print, Barth mentions the *Yodo-Shin* school in Buddhism and asks: “Why didn't you tell me anything about this before? The matter has interested me very much. Unfortunately I have been able to study this subject only the way it was possible to me from a distance, and it might well be, that my explanation on this point seem very amateurish in your eyes. . . . I would like to know, for instance, in how far there is a connection between the Yodo-teaching and the old Nestorian mission in China, from where it came to Japan. Or is any connection lacking? And were, or eventually are you influenced yourself directly or indirectly by this remarkable form of Buddhism?” (cited by Alle Hoekema, “Barth and Asia: ‘No Boring theology’”, *Exchange*, 33.2 (2004), 109.

² *CD I/2*, 283.

It is this fundamental distinction between revelation in Christ and religion which determines most of what Barth has to say about the religions. They cannot become the “true religion”, whereas this may be claimed of Christianity, within which human religious capacity is determined by God’s revelation.³ Therefore the other religions stand *a priori* under the verdict of being false. This view is exemplified in 1959, where Barth explicitly takes up the question of the world’s religions:

The various religions are the various attempts of the world to make something out of the presence and revelation of God which is known to it but not recognized by it. In religion the world tries to domesticate the God who is known and yet also unknown and strange, to bring him into its own natural and intellectual sphere of vision and power. In religion, then, the world unwittingly and unwillingly confesses that God is known to it as well as unknown. Not recognizing him, however, it fashions for itself, in the form of what seems to be a suitable image, worship and service of God, surrogates of his being and action, and of the human being and action demanded by him, believing that it can satisfy him with these surrogates and at the same time satisfy itself.⁴

Islam in Barth’s early writings

In Barth’s early writings he comments polemically and sporadically on Islam, clearly understanding it as a false religion.⁵ An example of this is in a sermon on 1 John 1:5 which he delivered in May 1916 to his congregation in Safenwil:

Gott ist Licht und nichts Anderes! . . . Gott ist nicht Allah, der Gott des falschen Propheten Mahommed, der wahllos geheimnisvoll Gutes und Böses sendet. Gott ist nicht das Schicksal, das nicht weiß, was es will. Gott ist Licht, und was er will, ist Liebe und Leben unter seinen Geschöpfen.⁶

³ Cf. Karl Barth’s portrayal of Christian life as “true religion” in *CD I/2*, 325-361.

⁴ Karl Barth, *The Christian Life: Church Dogmatics IV/4, Lecture Fragments*, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1981), 130.

⁵ This is consistent with his later writings: see for example *CD IV/2*, 42 and *CD IV/3.2*, 875.

⁶ Karl Barth, *Karl Barth Gesamtausgabe: Predigten 1916*, ed. Hermann Schmidt (Zürich: TVZ, 1998), 187. Hermann Schmidt believes that Barth’s early knowledge of Islam can be traced back to the work of Conrad von Orelli’s *Allgemeine Religionsgeschichte*: “Allwissenheit und Allmacht Gottes werden häufig verkündigt . . . Besonders aber wird seine Souveränität, d. h. schlechthinige Unabhängigkeit betont. Seine Majestät lässt sich in keiner Weise zur Rechenschaft ziehen; man muss sich unbedingt vor ihr beugen. Der Mensch kann vieles in Gottes Walten nicht begreifen . . .” (See C. von Orelli, *Allgemeine Religionsgeschichte* (Bonn: A. Marcus & E. Weber’s Verlag, 1911), 380). Schmidt also contends that Barth’s spelling of the Prophet’s name as “Mahommed” in this early

Another example is from a letter to Eduard Thurneysen in 1921 where Barth critically comments on a lecture given by Carl Stange about developments in the history of religions school:

. . . er ließ sich über indische Religionsgeschichte, Islam, über die Verhältnisse im Innern Afrikas, alte und neue Missionsmethoden, Märchenforschung, homerische Helden usf. mit einer Sachkunde vernehmen, die mich mit offenem Munde verharren ließ; hatte ich doch von den meisten dieser Dinge kaum dem Namen nach gehört, und das ist noch nicht einmal das Spezialfach dieses Schlangenmenschen. Ich deutete zum Schluß Beiden an, wie sehr sie mir gleicherweise unsympathisch seien in ihrem Tun, was aber nur Hirsch verstand und sofort aufschnellte: Ja, ja, er habe das schon in meiner Predigt heute gemerkt, bei mir sei das geschichtliche Christentum überhaupt nur eine Verheißung!⁷

The first glimpse of Barth's understanding of Islam as a *threat* to contemporary "Christendom" is in an article entitled "Questions to Christendom", published in 1931. Here Barth says that Christendom is faced with "a whole series of alien religions different from those of the past".⁸ These, he says, have an

sermon is influenced by Goethe's depiction of the Prophet in his play "Mahommet", a translation of Voltaire's Enlightenment drama of the same name (See Barth, *Karl Barth Gesamtausgabe: Predigten 1916*, 187-8). In the confirmation classes of 1909-10 and 1915-16 in Safenwil, Barth teaches on world religions. These classes are a mix of fact and opinion. For instance, the notes for the 1909-1910 session include some general facts about Islam as understood at that time, as well as Barth's opinions on different aspects of the religion: "Muhammed um 600 n. Chr. aus mächtigem Araberstamm, Hirt, dann Kameltreiber der Cadidja, die er später heiratet u. dadurch reich wird. Lernt auf Reisen Chrt [Christentum] (schlechte Vertreter, oberflächlich) u. Judentum kennen. Verückungszustände, Cadidja sagt ihm, er sei z. Propheten Gottes berufen. (Flug nach Jerusalem, durch 7 Himmel, zu Gott). Anhang u. Feinde (Lehre: nur ein Gott). 622 Flucht nach Medina (Hedschra) wird Machthaber, Einnahme von Mekka (hl. Stadt) Nach seinem Tod große Fortschritte (Spanien, bis Frankreich). – M[ohammed] war religiös u. intelligent, aber verdunkelt durch Eigennutz, Lüge, Polygamie. Seine Rel[igion] nehen heidnischen sehr hoch (Erfolge bei Negern!) weil monotheistisch, aber grausamer despotischer Gott (Allah ist groß u. M. ist sein Prophet) 5 Vorschriften; Beten, Almosengeben, Fasten im Ramadan, Waschungen, Wallfahrt nach Mekka. Mechanische Religion, äußerliche Moral, Versprechungen auf ein sinnliches Jenseits. Hl. Buch: Koran (114 Suren)" (See Karl Barth, *Karl Barth Gesamtausgabe: Konfirmandenunterricht 1909-1921*, ed. Jürgen Fangmeier (Zürich: TVZ, 1987), 63-4). Jürgen Fangmeier's footnotes to the 1915 lesson *Die Religionen* confirms Schmidt's thesis, citing similarities between Barth's statements about different world religions and statements made by von Orelli on the same topics (See Barth, *Karl Barth Gesamtausgabe: Konfirmandenunterricht 1909-1921*, 127-30).

⁷ Karl Barth, *Karl Barth Gesamtausgabe: Karl Barth – Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel, Band 2, 1921-1930*, ed. Eduard Thurneysen (Zürich: TVZ, 1974), 23. (In the quoted text *usf.* is an abbreviation for *und so fort.*)

⁸ Karl Barth, *Questions to Christendom (or Christendom's Present-Day Problems)*, trans. R. Birch Hoyle (London: The Lutterworth Press, 193- (undated)), 3.

irrational power over the individual. The “new religions” listed by Barth which are a threat to Christendom are “Genuine Communism (Russian)”, “International Fascism”, “‘Americanism’ ” and “New Islam”.⁹ On the latter he writes:

. . . now it is surely no accident that even in this our time the renowned historic religions of the East, the nearest to us and most striking of which is Islam, seem to have acquired new vitality. As a “religion” (in that power so distinctive of religion which unites all men and is ultimately a riddle) Islam seeks to be accepted quite differently and seriously. At various places Islam is crying to the Christian missionary an almost irresistible Halt! In the wonderfully complicated forms of “anthroposophy,” i.e. “man’s wisdom,” and Islam is sending its roots deep down into the soil of land where Christendom had sway.¹⁰

Islam in Barth’s writings of the Nazi Era

Of the new religions listed by Barth in 1931, the two most closely tied to each other over the next decade would be International Fascism, in the particular form of German National Socialism, and New Islam.

The political problem of Barth’ day was the totalitarian threat of National Socialism. As Bruce McCormack describes this period of Barth’s theological development at the University of Bonn, he indicates that, following the general election in Germany of September 1930, Barth had a political awakening, and, recognizing the very real threat presented by the National Socialists, joined the SPD (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands) in May 1931.¹¹ In a letter to Hans Asmussen (dated January 14, 1932), he declares:

After moving to Germany, I imposed upon myself a political interlude which lasted nearly ten years. But early last year, in view of the fact that right-wing terror was gaining the upper hand, I thought it right to make clear with whom I would like to be imprisoned and hanged.¹²

⁹ See *ibid.*, 4-6.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 6. In CD IV/1, 676, Barth blames Christian disunity in the mission fields of Asia as a contributing factor to the advancement of Islam there.

¹¹ McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 412-4.

¹² *Ibid.*, 414.

Barth was to stay in Bonn from March 1930 until June 1935.¹³ The period of 1933-35 saw his involvement in the German Church Struggle. In March 1933 he delivered a lecture on "The First Commandment as Theological Axiom". In this lecture Barth warns against giving allegiance to false gods on the basis of natural theology or natural orders of *Volk* or State.¹⁴ In many respects this lecture anticipates the most important document produced by the Confessing Church under Barth's influence – the Barmen Declaration of May 1934. The Declaration highlights the false notion that there are:

other sources or figures of revelation besides Jesus Christ, that demand unconditional loyalty and obedience in certain areas of life (Theses 1 and 2); that the message of the Church can legitimately be turned to ideological purposes which require the appointment of leaders with special power and authority in the Church for their execution (Theses 3 and 4); that the State can become an all-embracing system controlling every facet of life and replacing the Church, and that the Church can subvert its message to the purposes of the State, thereby becoming its extension (Theses 5 and 6).¹⁵

On 26 November 1934 Barth was suspended from the exercise of his teaching duties in Bonn for refusing to "give an unqualified oath of loyalty to Adolf Hitler."¹⁶ On 22 June 1935 he was formally dismissed by the Minister of Cultural Affairs in Berlin.¹⁷ In a letter to the French Reformed theologian Pierre Maury in December 1938, Barth says that he could no longer avoid the correlation between the Kingdom of God and any particular political ideology as he had done so up until now. The implication of this was that the Confessing Church should now be defending democracy more openly in the face of fascism than it had done.¹⁸ In the same month Barth delivered the lecture "The Church and the Political Questions of our Day" – an analysis of Hitler's attack on the Jewish people. Timothy Gorringer calls this his "most outspoken account of the Church's political responsibility".¹⁹ In it Barth writes: "Anti-Semitism is sin against the Holy Ghost. For anti-Semitism means

¹³ Ibid., 412.

¹⁴ Karl Barth, *Theologische Fragen und Antworten* (Zollikon: Evangelischer Verlag, 1957), 127-43.

¹⁵ Robert E. Willis, *The Ethics of Karl Barth* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971), 408.

¹⁶ McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 449.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Karl Barth, Pierre Maury, "*Nous qui pouvons encore parler*": *Correspondence 1928-1956*, ed. Bernard Reymond (Lausanne: L'Age d'homme, 1985), 268-9.

¹⁹ Timothy J. Gorringer, *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), 156.

rejection of the *grace* of God. But National Socialism lives, moves, and has its being in anti-Semitism.”²⁰ Anyone who rejects and persecutes the Jews “rejects and persecutes Him who died for the sins of the Jews – and then, and only *thereby* for our sins as well”.²¹ Gorringer paraphrases Barth:

The Church has to pray for [the suppression of anti-semitism] and [its] elimination as in former days it prayed for the overcoming of Islam. In face of it silence is impossible and only speaking out will do.²²

In this lecture Barth clearly links National Socialism and Islam. He describes National Socialism as a “proper Church”. He speaks of a “*new Islam*, its myth as a new Allah, and Hitler as this new Allah’s prophet”, against which decisive and final action must be taken.²³

What Barth means by calling National Socialism a “proper Church” is spelt out clearly in a short reply he makes to a letter by Emil Brunner in 1948 on the difference between National Socialism and Communism.²⁴ The major threat in National Socialism – which made it an unmitigated evil to be opposed at all cost – lay in the fact that both in Germany and elsewhere, people “had succumbed to Hitler’s spell”.²⁵ It was the fact that the pseudo-religious ideology put forth by the National Socialists had captured the imaginations and minds of the people, and threatened to become the ruling loyalty of their lives, that overshadowed, finally, even its obvious totalitarianism, its virulent anti-Semitism, and the militarism that brought about its extension throughout Europe. Barth writes:

Whether the essence of National Socialism consisted in its ‘totalitarianism’ or . . . in its ‘nihilism’, or again in its barbarism, or anti-semitism . . . what made it interesting from the Christian point of view was that it was a spell which notoriously revealed its power to overwhelm our souls, to persuade us to believe in its lies and to join in its evildoings. It could and would take us captive with “strong mail of

²⁰ Karl Barth, *The Church and the Political Problem of Our Day* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1939), 51.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Gorringer, *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony*, 157.

²³ Barth, *The Church and the Political Problem of our Day*, 43.

²⁴ Karl Barth, “Karl Barth’s Reply”, in *Against the Stream: Shorter Post-War Writings 1946-1952*, trans. E. M. Delacour and S. Godman, ed. R. G. Smith (London: SCM, 1949), 113-8.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 114.

craft and power". We were hypnotised by it as a rabbit by a giant snake. We were in danger of bringing, first incense, and then the complete sacrifice to it as a false god.²⁶

The danger posed by National Socialism, then, was not simply "a matter of declaiming some mischief, distant and easily seen through".²⁷ It was a matter of life and death, a historical crisis of the first order, and it called for resolute and unyielding resistance:

For that very reason I spoke then and was not silent. For that very reason I could not forgive the collaborators, least of all those among them who were cultured, decent and well-meaning. In that way I consider that I acted as befits a churchman.²⁸

Barth's understanding of National Socialism as an all encompassing threat to Europe in the 1930's and early 1940's (as a false religion) bears similarities to the understanding of Islam "as a strong political force and . . . perpetual threat" in the Europe of Martin Luther's time.²⁹ Von J. Paul Rajashekar contends that from the beginning of the First Crusade until the "zenith of the Ottoman imperialism" of the 16th century, "Muslims and Christians understood themselves to be two mutually exclusive societies at war. A good measure of Christian perception of Islam was influenced by this factor."³⁰

Specifically, Barth understands Islam as a cipher to speak of National Socialism. Like National Socialism, Islam's image of God is idolatrous³¹ and hence false.³² The worship of God by the (Muslim) Turk of Luther's time was a form of natural religion which parallels Barth's view of the pseudo-religion of National Socialism.³³ He cites Luther as saying that the Turks' desire to know God directly is

²⁶ Ibid., 115.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Von J. Paul Rajashekar "Luther and Islam: An Asian Perspective", *Lutherjahrbuch*, 57 (1990), 179.

³⁰ Ibid., 180.

³¹ CD I/2, 302.

³² CD IV/3, 875.

³³ CD I/2, 287. Barth uses the word *Turk* in the same sense as Luther. Rajashekar contends that this was a common medieval expression that is synonymous with Islam or Muslims. See Rajashekar, "Luther and Islam: An Asian Perspective", 177.

a form of “righteousness by works” which “means the fall of Lucifer and despair”.³⁴ In contrast to this, God in his revelation – Jesus Christ – does not allow humanity to come to terms with life, to justify and sanctify itself. Jesus Christ takes on the sin of the world and wills that “all our care should be cast upon him, because he careth for us”.³⁵ Barth quotes Luther as saying:

... by this article our faith is sundered from all other faiths on earth. For the Jews have it not, neither the Turks and Saracens, nor any Papist or false Christian or any other unbeliever, but only proper Christians. . . . (Luther, *Heer-pred. wid. d. Türcken*, 1529, *W.A.* 30 II 186, 15.)³⁶

And again:

We cannot do any greater despite to our Lord God than by unbelief, for by it we make God a devil. Again, we cannot do him any greater honour than by faith, when we regard him as a Saviour. Therefore he cannot abide a doubting heart, like the *Turk* [italics mine] who doubts, . . . by good works we do not become a Christian but remain a heathen (*Pred. üb. Joh. 4*⁴⁷⁻⁵⁴, 1534, *E.A.* 5, 229 f.).³⁷

Luther clearly sees the Turk as “an instrument of the devil” – Allah.³⁸ By comparison, Barth sees devotion to Adolf Hitler – *the new Mohammed* – as evil. He endorses Luther’s attitude to the Turkish War as providential.³⁹ Islam was a tangible threat to the Christian world in the Middle Ages.⁴⁰ The Turks had to be repelled then⁴¹ just as the Nazis have to be now. Illustrative of this last point of comparison is Barth’s powerful use of the imagery of the fusion of statecraft and religion in Islam in his “Letter to Great Britain From Switzerland”, to argue that Christians should support the war against Hitler:

³⁴ *CD* I/1, 169

³⁵ *CD* I/2, 309.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 309-310. Barth is quoting here from advice Luther gives to Christians, anticipating that many would be captured during Turkish raids into Germany: while in captivity in Turkey Christians should practice private devotions as an effective means of sustaining an inward faith. (See Egil Grisli, “Luther and the Turks: Part II”, *Muslim World*, 64.4 (October 1974), 278.

³⁷ *CD* IV/1, 415.

³⁸ Rajashekar “Luther and Islam: An Asian Perspective”, 184.

³⁹ *CD* III/3, 25.

⁴⁰ *CD* IV/3, 20.

⁴¹ *CD* III/3, 100.

We shall not regard this war, therefore, either as a crusade or as a war of religion. We shall spare ourselves the peculiar passions and the vain expectations and hopes which are wont to be bound up with such an undertaking; we may safely leave all such things to the *modern Mohammed* [italics mine] and his deceived hordes.⁴²

Islam in Barth's Dogmatic Writings: Monotheism

The Göttingen Dogmatics

Islam is referred to in the *Göttingen Dogmatics* in a discussion on the uniqueness of the "oneness" of God. Here Barth uses Islam as an example of the misunderstanding that God's oneness is in fact monotheism and that Christianity has this attribute in common with Islam:

If we think through the concept of unity to the end we can come dangerously near to Islam's fanatical proclamation of the one God It was not a good moment when the discovery was made that Christianity and Islam at least have monotheism in common as compared with other religions. If by the uniqueness of God what is meant is so-called monotheism, the religiously clarified and embellished idea of the "one," the cult of the number 1, then the uniqueness of *God* is certainly not meant.⁴³

There is no way to speak "generically" about God. All speech about the one true, living, Triune God must be recognized as highly particular. One can only speak correctly about God if one has been enabled to know God by means of God's self-revelation. For Barth this means that one cannot correctly speak about God unless one does justice to the *triune* nature of revelation. Only God can reveal God, and that is precisely what God does reveal: Godself in a three-fold manner. God *is* Triune. Hence to speak of God without holding on to this recognition is to be speaking falsely of God.

This has to be held dialectically in tension with the recognition that at all times one should have in mind the one God who was revealed to Abraham, Isaac,

⁴² Karl Barth, "A Letter to Great Britain from Switzerland", in *A Letter to Great Britain from Switzerland*, trans. E. H. Gordon and G. Hill (London: The Sheldon Press and New York: Macmillan, 1941), 20-1.

⁴³ Karl Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 430.

Jacob and Moses. There is but one God and this “oneness” must be recognized as highly particular. The way in which Christians make use of the term “monotheism” when speaking of God is therefore also highly particular, in case an idol is set up in the name of protecting the universality of God. Monotheism, Barth insists, is not protected by downplaying God’s “threeness”:

As though God did not reveal himself as he is, his essence, when he reveals himself! as though for him manifestation and essence, economic being and immanent being, were not one in revelation rather than two! as though to all eternity and in the deepest depth of his deity he were not this God, the *one* in *three*, because he is *God*: the object that turns and becomes *subject*, wherever and however we may think it, when we think of this object.⁴⁴

The biblical witness for Barth is an affirmation of the absolute uniqueness and particularity of the “oneness” of the Subject of revelation:

Revelation is not the peak of the particular on the mountain of the usual and the universal. It is the heaven above all else that is distinctive or general. When one ventures to say “God,” then in all else that we say there must resound in ours ears like the thunder on Sinai: “I am the Lord thy God, thou shalt have none other gods but me” [Ex. 19:16; 20:2-3]. This is what *Iēsous Kyrios* meant on the lips of the first Christians.⁴⁵

Faithfulness to the First Commandment demands faithfulness to the scandal of particularity in which the one Triune God reveals Godself. “The content of revelation is God”, Barth reminds his hearers.⁴⁶ “God cannot reveal anything more certain, more specific, more living than himself. Any emptiness or abstraction that we might first feel when hearing the term ‘God’ is on our side.”⁴⁷ One must allow the one God of Israel who raised Jesus from the dead to tell humanity who God is and then not allow humanity to stray from this self-definition at any step of the way.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 101.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 109.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 88.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 89.

What Christians mean therefore by the oneness of God is not meant in any way to be understood in continuity with Islamic monotheism:

The “if only I have Thee” with which we here call God unique is not in any sense a general idea that we can form, but a command that meets us: “You shall have no other gods but me [Exod. 20:3] – this is the basis of the uniqueness – and: “You shall not make any image or likeness” [Exod. 20:4] – this is the basis of the simplicity. The basis of the divine unity lies in the Johannine I: “I am the way, the truth . . . I am the resurrection” [John 14:6; 11:25]. God tells us that he wills to be known and worshiped as unique and simple, so that there is no reason for us to become intoxicated with our monotheism . . . In God’s Word in which he meets us as a He there is no basis for this type of uniqueness or simplicity, *the Mohammedan* [italics mine] . . .⁴⁸

Islam is a “lofty and refined” type of monotheism, an attempt to “bypass God’s Word”.⁴⁹ But there is no way of getting around God’s Word, of bypassing revelation, if one is to understand what is meant by God’s three-in-oneness. God’s three-in-oneness is absolutely unique, without creaturely equivalence, simply due to the fact that the triunity one is attempting to describe is God’s, of which there is only one example.⁵⁰

The starting point for deriving the doctrine of the Trinity therefore has a specific origin: “the confession of revelation in Jesus, the confession *Iēsous Kyrios*”.⁵¹ This confession is fundamentally at odds with Islam.⁵² The Christian faith, in its evangelical form, has to be opposed to all other faiths, specifically Islam, as Christianity is “the confession of truth as opposed to that of error and untruth”.⁵³

The Church Dogmatics

The oneness of God is again addressed in the *Church Dogmatics*. In CD I/1 §9, *The Triunity of God*, Barth warns that the Church must speak very carefully about God’s

⁴⁸ Ibid., 431.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Later in the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth states that the triunity of the Christian God means that God is different from the God of Judaism and Islam. See CD III/3, 30. Islam is described as a “later caricature of Jewish monotheism” (CD III/1, 453).

⁵¹ Barth, *Göttingen Dogmatics*, 103f.

⁵² See CD IV/1, 183.

⁵³ CD I/2, 828.

“oneness”. As in the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, Barth emphasizes here that there is no excuse for speaking of the Christian faith in God as “a kind of monotheism”, another representation of which is Islam.⁵⁴

Monotheism is not some general category, but has a very specific content. Reiterating the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, Barth believes that it is only in revelation that the Church recognizes that it must speak of God as both one and three, and that the “oneness” of God is only such that it includes the idea of the “threeness”.⁵⁵ It is not, Barth declares, that the Church tries to hold on to the concept of God’s unity *in spite* of the doctrine of the Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity *is precisely how* the Church has felt itself compelled to describe the unity of God. The concept of God’s “oneness” and the concept of God’s “threeness” must come from the same source or else the Church becomes embroiled in a useless attempt to reconcile two unrelated concepts. It is not that reason is able to discover and describe God’s oneness and revelation provides the impetus for speaking about God’s threeness, so that the threeness needs to fit into a prior understanding of oneness, Barth explains. Again echoing the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, he contends that revelation must be allowed to serve as the only source for describing the being of God.⁵⁶ In God’s revelation God discloses Godself to be the God of unity in trinity in whom only the equality of Father, Son and Spirit is compatible with true monotheism – not the monotheism of abstraction (e.g. the monotheism of Islam), but the monotheism of the true God in God’s self-revelation.⁵⁷

Many religions are explicitly or implicitly monotheistic, but at issue in the unity of self-revelation is the unique revealed unity which must not be confused with the singularity or isolation of numerical unity.⁵⁸ The unity of God includes a distinction and order in deity which is the distinction and order of the three divine persons.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ *CD I/1*, 353.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 351.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 351-3.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 353.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 353-4.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 355.

Barth believes that speaking of “modes of being” to describe the persons of the Trinity does more to protect against charges of abstract monotheism than the traditional theological concept “person”. It does much to prevent the distinctions from being dissolved into a single essentially undifferentiated concept of an Absolute Personality or Spirit. Father, Son and Spirit are not encountered as three individual centres of consciousness, three persons, which are then somehow to be reconciled with the idea of God as one person. In revelation, God addresses the human being as the one God here, here and here, again and again and again. The single subject is repeated in three modes of being, distinguishable, yet inseparable:

What we have here are God’s specific, different, and always very distinctive modes of being. This means that God’s modes of being are not to be exchanged or confounded. In all three modes of being God is the one God both in Himself and in relation to the world and man. But this one God is God three times in different ways, so different that it is only in this threefold difference that He is God, so different that this difference, this being in these three modes of being, is absolutely essential to Him, so different, then, that this difference is irremovable. Nor can there be any possibility that one of the modes of being might just as well be the other, e.g., that the Father might just as well be the Son or the Son the Spirit, nor that two of them or all three of them might coalesce and dissolve into one. In this case the modes of being would not be essential to the divine being. Because the threeness is grounded in the one essence of the revealed God; because in denying the threeness in the unity of God we should be referring at once to another God than the God revealed in Holy Scripture – for this very reason this threeness must be regarded as irremovable and the distinctiveness of the three modes of being must be regarded as ineffaceable.⁶⁰

Barth follows Tertullian, the Cappadocians, Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, Calvin and Luther in making the *relationality* of these three modes that which constitutes the Trinity. Father, Son, and Spirit are “three distinctive modes of being of the one God subsisting in their relationships one with another”.⁶¹ Quoting Luther he argues that this relationality guards against Islam:

. . . With this faith I here guard myself . . . against . . . Mahomet, and all that are wiser than God Himself, and mix not the persons into one person, but in true Christian faith retain three distinct persons in the

⁶⁰ CD I/1, 360-1.

⁶¹ Ibid., 366.

one divine, eternal essence, all three of which, to us and creatures, are one God, Creator and Worker of all things. (*Von den letzten Worten Davids*, 1543, *W.A.*, 54, 58, 4).⁶²

Islamic monotheism is again mentioned in an exposition of the unity of God as one of the perfections of the divine freedom in §31 of *CD II/1*: God is free both in Godself, in an absolute sense, and in being free from external conditioning. Thus, although God in God's freedom can relate and indeed does relate to the real world, the world is rendered relative to God:

The relativity of the other is made necessary . . . by God's absoluteness. It is made irrevocably necessary. There cannot, then, be any divinisation of the world . . .⁶³

This is "a designation of His freedom, of His being as it is self-grounded and therefore absolutely superior to every other being".⁶⁴ God is absolute in both a noetic and an ontic sense. God is not "one instance in a genus".⁶⁵ God is absolutely unique, "an instance outside every genus".⁶⁶ Therefore one cannot ascribe the unity that is a predicate of creaturely unities to God, otherwise unity and uniqueness would be absolutised above God. The concept behind absolutising unity and uniqueness above God is monotheism:

"Monotheism" is an idea which can be directly divined or logically and mathematically constructed without God. It is the reflection of the subjective sub-consciousness, the requirement of freedom and the claim to mastery on the part of the human individual; or it is the reflection of this as already reflected in the various cosmic forces of nature or spirit, fate or reason, desire or duty; or more concretely it is perhaps one of the various "incarnations" of these cosmic forces which in his occasional doubts about the divinity of his own individuality man absolutises in an attempt to reach out beyond himself and in this inverted way to advance his own elevation to deity.⁶⁷

⁶² Ibid., 365.

⁶³ *CD II/1*, 309.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 447.

⁶⁵ Ibid. See also *CD IV/3*, 727 with regard to the people of God.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 448

An example of the “absolutising” of “uniqueness” is “the noisy fanaticism of Islam regarding the one God, alongside whom, it is humorous to observe, only the baroque figure of His prophet is entitled to a place of honour”:⁶⁸

The artifice adopted by Islam consists in its developing to a supreme degree what is at the heart of all paganism, revealing and setting at the very centre its esoteric essence, i.e. so-called “monotheism”. . . . Monotheism . . . can be impressive and convincing as knowledge of God only so long as we fail to note the many-sided dialectic in which we are thereby inevitably entangled and in which Islam is incurably entangled. For the cosmic forces in whose objectivity it is believed that the unique has been found are varied. It is only by an act of violence that one of them can be given pre-eminence over the others . . . Who is the first and foremost and really the one who is unique – Allah or his prophet, Allah or his devotees? Monotheism is all very well so long as this conflict does not break out. But it will inevitably break out again and again.⁶⁹

By contrast Christ is the unique way that God has chosen to reveal Himself and this is what is recognised through Christian faith. It is only by reference to the norm of Jesus Christ that humans are enabled to receive God’s revelation:

the divine immanence in all its varied possibilities has its origin in Jesus Christ and therefore its unity in Him, but only in Him, in the diversity of its actions and stages. . . . All other unities of immanence which we seek and think we find cannot constitute the unity of His immanence . . . We are simply making an idol of the ruins of His immanence . . . and in the service and worship of this idol we can only more and more blind ourselves to the true God present to His creation.⁷⁰

For Barth, the cause of Islam as one of the “various heathen religions” is that it does not know or refuses to know the “ground of divine immanence in Jesus Christ”.⁷¹ Ultimately Islam is “enslavement to a false god”.⁷² Alternatively:

Christology . . . must always constitute the basis and criterion for the apprehension and interpretation of the freedom of God in His immanence. The legitimacy of every theory concerning the

⁶⁸ Ibid. See also Barth, *Göttingen Dogmatics*, 430.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 448-9.

⁷⁰ *CD* II/1, 318-9.

⁷¹ Ibid., 319.

⁷² Ibid.

relationship of God and man or God and the world can be tested by considering whether it can be understood also as an interpretation of the relationship and fellowship created and sustained in Jesus Christ.⁷³

Islam in Barth's Dogmatic Writings: a 'paganised' form of rabbinic Judaism

Islam is referred to in the *Church Dogmatics* as a "paganised" form of "the semi-biblical religion of post-Christian Judaism", i.e. Judaism shorn of the doctrines of election and grace.⁷⁴ This statement is posited in the context of a discussion of providence and creation, in which Barth denies that belief in a divine creator in the three faiths of Judaism, Islam and Christianity is anything more than a superficial similarity between them. For Barth the Christian God is different from the God of Judaism and Islam.⁷⁵ To attempt to unravel what this might mean for a possible encounter with Islam, it is first necessary to investigate the place of Israel in Barth's theology.

It is in the Doctrine of God that Barth deals with the question of Israel within the context of election.⁷⁶ The community of those who are elected in Christ is

⁷³ Ibid., 320.

⁷⁴ CD III/3, 28.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 30

⁷⁶ In the first part of his Doctrine of God, Barth explains that the freedom of God is God's freedom to be with those who are not God. This does not imply an obligation of relation on God's part. On the contrary, even in relationship, "God stands at an infinite distance from everything else" as God "confronts all that is in supreme and utter independence" (CD II/1, 311). Indeed, God would still be God without any relationship with those that are not God. Thus, if God does initiate such a relation, it is purely a function of God's grace, which in turn entails a relation "between two utterly unequal partners" (ibid., 312). Grace is "a turning, not in equality, but in condescension. The fact that God is gracious means that he condescends," that is, God initiates a relationship with humankind "because He alone is truly transcendent, and stands on an equality with nothing outside Himself" (ibid., 354). It is on this understanding of God that Barth draws out the concept of election which is, "fundamentally, the doctrine of God's method of encountering humankind in relationship" (Mark R. Lindsay, *Covenanted Solidarity: the Theological Basis of Karl Barth's opposition to Nazi Antisemitism and the Holocaust* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 214). For Barth the doctrine of election is the sum of the Gospel because "God elects man; . . . God is for man . . . the One who loves in freedom" (CD II/2, 3). This implies a movement of God towards humanity. This, as such, is a movement of grace (ibid., 7). This movement is personalized in its identity with Jesus Christ, the Jewish man of Nazareth. On this point Barth diverges from earlier theological paradigms, "above all from Calvin's doctrine of predestination" (Herbert Hartwell, *The Theology of Karl Barth: An Introduction* (London: Duckworth, 1964), 105). For Barth the doctrine of election has to have its grounds in the God who is known as Jesus Christ (Colin Gunton, "Karl Barth's Doctrine of Election as part of his Doctrine of God", *Journal of Theological Studies*, 25.2 (1970), 382). The very being and essence of God is that God elects. For Barth this is part of what it means to be God: "in Himself, in the primal and basic decision in which he wills to be and actually is God, in the mystery of what takes place from and to all eternity within Himself, within his triune being, God is none other than the One who in His Son or Word elects Himself, and in and with Himself elects His people (CD II/2, 76). This election has priority

identified as “the reality both of Israel and of the Church”.⁷⁷ According to Barth, the elected community exists in this twofold form, and offers a twofold function of witness: “as Israel . . . to serve the representation of the divine judgment, . . . as the Church the representation of the divine mercy. In its form as Israel it is determined for hearing, and in its form as the Church for believing the promise sent forth to man.”⁷⁸ In this duality of form and service, the community of Israel and the Church is “one community of God”.⁷⁹

[T]he community as the primary object of the election which has taken place and takes place in Jesus Christ is one. Everything that is to be said of it in the light of the divine predestination will necessarily result in an emphasising of this unity.⁸⁰

over all the acts of God. All the other things that God does – creation, reconciliation, redemption – are, Barth says, “grounded and determined in the fact that God is the God of the eternal election of His grace” (ibid., 14). The God who creates, etc., is the One who is the electing God. God’s electing grace is not an afterthought, hastily improvised after the catastrophe that overtook the first and independent order of creation. God, as essentially the electing God, makes the universe in order that it may be the arena in which his gracious purposes may come to pass. It is therefore the presupposition of all God’s works. “It is because of this that we put the doctrine of election . . . at the very beginning, and indeed before the beginning, of what we have to say concerning God’s dealings with His creation” (ibid., 89). Election is something God does in, with and to Godself before the election of humanity. But this election is gracious and free. Once this *inner* grace and freedom are established, an outer movement can be seen to belong inseparably to it as the binding by God of Godself to what is not God – that is, to humanity, in and with Jesus Christ. The outcome is that God’s “self-determination is identical with the decree of His movement towards man. . . . The reality and revelation of this movement is Jesus Christ himself” (ibid., 91-92). “It is self-giving. And that is how the inner glory of God overflows” (ibid., 121). “Under the concept of predestination . . . we can say that in freedom (its affirmation and not its loss) God tied Himself to the universe” (ibid., 155). “In this primal decision God did not remain satisfied with His own being in Himself. He reached out to something beyond, willing something more than his own being” (ibid., 168). Thus, the twofold movement of the grace of God both comes to expression in and *is* the history of Jesus Christ. Christ is both the subject and the object of election, the electing God (ibid., 103) and the elect man (ibid., 116), for Christ is at the same time the God who elects graciously and the man who is the recipient of grace. Barth’s determination to posit Christ as both the subjective and objective grounds of election forces him to reject the hermeneutical principle of his predecessors that replaced Jesus with the *decretum absolutum* as the content and presupposition of predestination. Mark R. Lindsay contends that for Barth, “the idea of an original divine decree of predestination which is outside of, beyond, and prior to Christ and of which he finds especially strong evidence in Calvin, leads to uncertainty and fear on the one hand, and an emptying of the meaning of the doctrine on the other” (Lindsay, *Covenanted Solidarity: the Theological Basis of Karl Barth’s opposition to Nazi Antisemitism and the Holocaust*, 216). If election is located in the “will and decision of God which are hidden somewhere in the heights or depths behind Jesus Christ and behind God’s revelation”, humanity is deprived of all knowledge of election and all certainty about its election in Christ (CD II/2, 64). Barth’s doctrine of election seeks to negate this fear (ibid., 69).

⁷⁷ CD II/2, 196.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 195.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 195.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 197.

The existence of this unity is a function of the fact that “the bow of the one covenant” of grace arches over both Israel and the Church.⁸¹ Jesus Christ is the personification of the gracious covenant under which both exist. He is:

the promised son of Abraham and David, the Messiah of Israel. And He is simultaneously the Head and Lord of the Church, called and gathered from Jews and Gentiles. In both these characters He is indissolubly one. And as the One He is ineffaceably both. As the Lord of the Church He is the Messiah of Israel, and as the Messiah of Israel He is Lord of the Church.⁸²

Consequently, Barth insists that the Jews cannot be called “the ‘rejected’ and the Church the ‘elected’ community. The object of election is neither Israel for itself nor the Church for itself, but both together in their unity. . . . What is elected in Jesus Christ (His ‘body’) is the community which has the two-fold form of Israel and the Church.”⁸³ The one community elected by God takes two definitive forms, so that the Church cannot exist by repressing Israel.

The difference between the two forms is that Israel is a “people” of which one usually becomes a member through birth, whereas one becomes a member of the Church by being called. Furthermore, although the Church may well have been revealed at Pentecost, it did not originate there. It already pre-existed in a hidden form in the Israel of the Old Testament.⁸⁴ Therefore as long as Judaism is rooted in this Israel, it cannot seriously be a foreign body to the Church nor the Church to Judaism. Judaism is essential to the Church because the Church as the second form of the one community has been engrafted into God’s people. It is essential for the Church to have Jews not only around it but also in it. The presence of Jews in the Church was represented by the first apostles, particularly Paul, who were simultaneously Jewish and Christian. They did not abandon Judaism because of their faith in Christ but remained Jews, loyal and obedient members of Israel, the eternally elect people.

⁸¹ Ibid., 200.

⁸² Ibid., 197-8.

⁸³ Ibid., 199.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 212.

Though hidden except to faith in Christ, the reality of this twofold community is not entirely imperceptible. It can be recognized, according to Barth, by its witness to the fulfilled covenant of grace. The covenantal community is represented not only by the Church (as classical dogmatics would have it) but first of all by Israel, and then along with Israel by the Church as well. Eberhard Busch contends that this idea has not always been well understood. What Barth means is that:

both [Israel and the Church] give their witness through their positions, which they receive and truly possess through the fulfilment of the covenant by Christ's reconciliation: as the first-chosen Israel and as the church called to this covenant from among the Gentiles. Their witness takes on a double form, corresponding to the double-faceted election of grace: as the first-chosen, Israel attests that God chooses to be a God in communion with sinners; as those who are called later, Gentile Christians attest that God chooses sinners to be in communion with him. Each therefore attests to a specific aspect, both of which are to be respected in their uniqueness, and each of which also fits together under the arch of the covenant. Both attest to God's gracious election and covenant in an irrevocably different manner but in such a way that their testimonies need and complement each other. . . . Therefore the church cannot be a witness to the covenant of grace alone, but only together with Israel. By witnessing *together* they show forth the *unity* of the community.⁸⁵

The two forms of witness display the covenant's twofold fulfilment in Christ. As a result, neither form is neutralised, but in their distinction they enhance one another. However, Israel does not recognize that the covenant first made with it has now been fulfilled in Christ. Israel abstracts itself from this fulfilment,⁸⁶ and therefore also from its membership in the one community. According to Barth, however, Christ does not abstract himself from Israel. He is "primarily and supremely . . . theirs"⁸⁷ since he has elected to make his abode in the "flesh and blood [of] Judah-Israel".⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Eberhard Busch, "The Covenant of Grace fulfilled in Christ as the Foundation of the Indissoluble Solidarity of the Church with Israel: Barth's Position on the Jews during the Hitler Era", *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 52.2 (1999), 491.

⁸⁶ *CD* II/2, 263.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 210.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 211.

As the promise irrevocably given them with this fact is maintained their membership of the one elected community of God is confirmed and ratified. It is confirmed and ratified not only with respect to the service which they cannot evade, but also with respect to the grace of God addressed to them, which they can indeed resist but cannot nullify.⁸⁹

This promise gives the Church hope that at the conclusion of God's ways the non-necessary divide will be overcome. Then, as Barth puts it, "the differentiation within the community should confirm its unity".⁹⁰ The Church hopes for the advent of this fullness, because it is already a reality in Christ, even if not now manifest in the community on earth. But the Church cannot properly hope that the difference will be set aside. For the Church lives forever "by nothing else but the grace of God directed towards Israel".⁹¹ As long as the Jews do not realize that they are inseparably linked in one covenantal community by the same divine faithfulness that calls and adds others to them, then the Church "must take the lead, confessing the unity of the fellowship of God", but always with the desire "to see that Israel's special service in the community is not interrupted but faithfully continued".⁹²

Barth repeatedly returns to the inviolability of God's faithfulness and election in the face of Israel's resistance and disobedience. "By their resistance to their election they cannot create any fact that finally turns the scale against their own election, separating them from the love of God in Jesus Christ, cancelling the eternal decree of God."⁹³ Israel cannot "by any breach of the covenant annul the covenant of mercy which God has established between himself and man. ... Nor can Israel do anything to alter the fact that this promise is given and applies to itself, that in and with the election of Jesus Christ it and no other is God's elected people."⁹⁴ There can be a dishonouring of one's election, a futile attempt to live in contradiction to it, but no such attempt can, for Barth, change the reality of the Jews' divine election which is an "election of grace" and one which "they cannot overthrow or overturn".⁹⁵

⁸⁹ Ibid., 210.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 207.

⁹¹ Ibid., 267.

⁹² Ibid., 234.

⁹³ Ibid., 209.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 237.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 349.

The most instructive of Barth's statements that confirm the Jews' ongoing election occur in his exegeses of Romans 9-11. In speaking of Paul's analogy of the potter (Romans 9:20-21), Barth identifies Israel as "vessels of dishonour" and the Church as "vessels of honour", with Israel's distinctive service being to "witness to the divine judgment".⁹⁶ He is adamant, however, that this is not the final word on the matter. There is a misunderstanding of the thrust of Paul's argument if an assumption is made that the analogy implies "a juxtaposition of two different purposes of God". Both are used as witnesses to Jesus Christ:

The twofold action of the potter does not by any means take place along parallel lines, in symmetry and equilibrium, so that proceeding from a centre of indifference . . . God will now accept and now reject. . . [Rather] His operation *εἰς τιμὴν* is one thing and His operation *εἰς ἀτιμίαν* is another, and they stand in an irreversible sequence and order.⁹⁷

Mark R. Lindsay contends that here "there is a Yes and a No spoken, but they are related in an unequal dialectic whereby the No exists only for the sake of, and on the way towards, the Yes. This [is an] asymmetrical dialectic . . . whereby, on the one hand, one cannot exist within God's covenant without also standing under God's judgment but, in a more ultimate sense, one cannot stand under God's judgment without also existing within the covenant of *life*."⁹⁸

In other words, "[t]he harsh appearance that can descend . . . as if God's mercy and hardening, the existence of 'vessels of honour' and of 'dishonour' were the two goals of two different ways of God – is now finally dispelled".⁹⁹ To Barth's mind, therefore, the end of the ways of God is the resolution of the dialectic in favour of His mercy. Indeed, "[i]f God's mercy is so rich and powerful even upon Gentiles

⁹⁶ Ibid., 223-4.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 224.

⁹⁸ Lindsay, *Covenanted Solidarity: the Theological Basis of Karl Barth's opposition to Nazi Antisemitism and the Holocaust*, 221.

⁹⁹ CD II/2, 225.

who were standing wholly under His curse and sentence of rejection, how much more so upon those [Israel] to whom He has already promised it!”¹⁰⁰

This fidelity of God to God’s people and promise, and the inability of humankind to condition or delimit the efficacy of God’s work, is the reason why Barth is compelled to affirm a vital and hopeful future for Israel. “Hath God cast away his people?”, Barth quotes from Romans 11:1.¹⁰¹ In concert with the apostle Paul, he replies in the negative. The question faced by the apostle is “the question asked by Christian anti-semitism, whether the crucifixion of Jesus Christ does not settle the fact that the Jews are now to be regarded and treated only as the people accursed by God”.¹⁰² As an “anti-Semitic question . . . of unbelief, . . . those who put this question can only be called to repentance with the utmost urgency”.¹⁰³ For Barth the “remnant” of Israel, as symbolised by Elijah who, along with seven thousand others who refused to apostatize (1 Kings 19:15), represent the ever-present group of the faithful within an otherwise unfaithful Israel. This faithful remnant represents “the whole of Israel” and as such is proof, in Barth’s opinion, that the election of Israel *qua* Israel is confirmed by God. Thus, “[i]n this remnant God’s election of Israel has found its human reflection. There is revealed in it the fact that God’s election is not simply transferred to the Gentiles. Israel is not abandoned as its original object. Even less is there any reason to suppose that the election had never been seriously intended as an election of Israel but that it had only the Gentiles as its object from the very first. No . . . God’s election is established as an election of Israel.”¹⁰⁴ Indeed, the continued existence of Israel is the “presupposition without which there would be no Church and no Gentile Christians”.¹⁰⁵

Barth’s recurring theme in his doctrine of election is that humankind – not the Jews specifically, but humankind as such – is fully deserving of rejection, but that this rejection has been borne instead by God.¹⁰⁶ There is no one who stands apart from this promise. Indeed, the chief service of the community of God is to proclaim

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 231.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 267.

¹⁰² Ibid., 269.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 273.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 274.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 285.

¹⁰⁶ See for example *CD* II/2, 306, 322-3, 348.

to everyone that they are elect. The proclamation of the community “will continually call the divided together by proclaiming to believers their merited rejection and to unbelievers their unmerited election, and to both the One in whom they are elect and not rejected”.¹⁰⁷

Consequently, there can be belief only *for* unbelievers, not against them. Rejection is not, for Barth, an equally open and valid course.¹⁰⁸ An unbeliever cannot be regarded as rejected. Not everyone lives according to their election but this does not negate God’s decision. According to Barth’s paradigm, all exist within the sphere of the divine election of grace, some obediently, others disobediently, but nevertheless *all*. For those who exist in disobedience, their attempt to deny their election is futile. Because God has elected Jesus to be the Rejected, it is “objectively impossible” for anyone ultimately to triumph against their own election.¹⁰⁹

This victory in Barth’s theology of election renders the No of God against humanity ultimately impotent in the face of the divine Yes. In McCormack’s terminology, this is the employment of a “supplementary dialectic”.¹¹⁰ This is a type of dialectic where “one member of a pair predominates in value and potency over the other”. As a consequence of this “imbalance” the predominant member is able to overcome the other. At some point, “the stronger member takes up the weaker into itself . . . , an initial situation of opposition gives way to one of reconciliation”.¹¹¹ Lindsay contends that “[i]n this case, it is the Yes of God that triumphs over the No, the election over the rejection, such that all people, irrespective of their attitude and their race, are enclosed within the sphere of election and, therefore, of grace and life. If there exists the threat of rejection, there exists as the greater reality in which it is enclosed, the promise of election.”¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 236.

¹⁰⁸ See for example CD II/2, 349-50, 416.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 346.

¹¹⁰ McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 163. See also Lindsay, *Covenanted Solidarity: the Theological Basis of Karl Barth’s opposition to Nazi Antisemitism and the Holocaust*, 228.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Lindsay, *Covenanted Solidarity: the Theological Basis of Karl Barth’s opposition to Nazi Antisemitism and the Holocaust*, 228.

It is in this context that the “Judas passage” of §35.4, in which Barth launches an attack upon unbelieving Israel, is set. For Barth, Judas is the archetypal figure of rejection who, in turn, represents Israel. The implication that the Jews must be regarded as having been fundamentally rejected by God is inescapable. But as has already been argued, Barth insists that the object of God’s election is the unity of Church-Israel where, in effect, *all* of humanity exists in God’s election of grace.

Lindsay contends that, in order for one to see the hermeneutical key to this controversial passage, one must understand that for Barth any discussion of the rejection of Israel cannot occur in isolation. “It is valid and meaningful only if the overarching covenant of election, as the divinely-imposed limit of rejection, has been established in advance. . . . the rejection of Israel by God cannot have ultimate significance.”¹¹³

Barth consistently refuses to regard Judas and/or Judas-Israel in isolation as the sole ciphers of sin and rejection. On the contrary, Judas is depicted as standing in the closest proximity to the Church. He is “undoubtedly a disciple and apostle: no more so, but also no less so, than Peter and John; sharing as they do the same calling, institution and mission”.¹¹⁴ Indeed, Barth suggests that, of all the twelve, Judas is the one most appropriately called an apostle because “he alone . . . belongs like Jesus to the tribe of Judah, the seed of David”.¹¹⁵ Judas was in no sense an apostle only in appearance. He was, rather, “genuinely elect”, albeit at the same time rejected.¹¹⁶ But far from identifying Judas exclusively with Israel, Barth insists that “Jesus was handed over by one of His own, by one of his disciples and apostles, from within the Church”.¹¹⁷ Thus, at this most decisive juncture “the Church stands and acts in identity with the Israel which rejected its Messiah, together with the heathen world which allied itself with this Israel, and made itself a partner in its guilt”.¹¹⁸ At this point, “the apostles have to share the guilt of Israel and the Gentile world towards Jesus, in order that Jesus may carry out the will of God, not only in relation to them,

¹¹³ Ibid., 291.

¹¹⁴ CD II/2, 459.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 460.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

but also to Israel and the world".¹¹⁹ Indeed, not only was the work of Judas an act done within the Church, but it was something which any of the apostles could have done. "To be sure, they have not actually done it or co-operated with him. But the point is that they obviously could have done it."¹²⁰ To this extent, "the Church shares a point of contact with Israel".¹²¹ So, while "the basic flaw was revealed in Judas, . . . it was that of the apostolate as a whole".¹²² Sinfulness and the guilt of Jesus' death cannot be ascribed either to Judas or Israel alone.

A central motif in the 'Judas passage' is that of *παραδοῦναι* (*handing-over*).¹²³ Barth notes that, after taking Judas' place in the apostolate, Paul continues what Judas had begun, the task of handing Jesus over to the Gentiles. In Paul's case, however, it is done in faithfulness through the preaching of the gospel, rather than in treachery. In other words, Barth affirms a movement from rejection to election. He writes: "the elect always occupies what was originally the place of a rejected, and that the work of the elect can only be the amazing reversal of the work of the rejected".¹²⁴ By God's grace in Jesus Christ, the last word that must be said about any rejected is that "in his place, . . . an elect will one day stand".¹²⁵ According to Barth, this is as true of Israel as it is of Judas. Israel always has "the role of the chosen people of God which finds its true fulfilment in the Church".¹²⁶ As such, this movement of grace represents "the victory of the election . . . over . . . rejection".¹²⁷

Katherine Sonderegger understands Barth's meaning to be that this movement from the particularity of Israel (symbolised by Judas) to the universality of Israel-Church (symbolised by Paul) implies that "the community [is] now 'open to the nations' ". This is not a repudiation of Israel's mission – "they were called to be 'light to the nations' " – but the fulfilment of it.¹²⁸

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 461.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 471.

¹²¹ Lindsay, *Covenanted Solidarity: the Theological Basis of Karl Barth's opposition to Nazi Antisemitism and the Holocaust*, 292.

¹²² CD II/2, 475.

¹²³ Ibid., 480.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 484.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Katherine Sonderegger, *That Jesus Christ was born a Jew: Karl Barth's "Doctrine of Israel"* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 105-6.

Another *handing-over* in this excursus is the handing over of men and women by God to His wrath. Barth describes this as “the mysterious and terrible divine ‘delivery’ according to which God in His burning wrath . . . does to men what Judas did to Jesus”.¹²⁹

There are two significant aspects to this divine *παραδοῦναι*. First, Barth characteristically submits Jews, Christians and non-believers alike to the same sentence. Who, he asks, are “delivered” by God? According to Acts 7:39ff, it is the “Israelite fathers, to whom God had spoken but who disobeyed Him, who returned in their hearts to Egypt”.¹³⁰ According to Romans 1:18, it is the Gentiles. But, on the basis of 1 Corinthians 5:1ff and 1 Timothy 1:9ff, it must also be acknowledged that Christians are handed over by God to the punishment of God’s wrath. Indeed, in the case of the Christians, Barth is especially severe. They have been abandoned to the power and lordship of Satan, a punishment of which Barth speaks explicitly only in relation to Christians, and not in relation to either the Gentiles or the Israelite fathers.¹³¹ In any event, what God visits upon all of those who are handed over in this way is rejection (although as has been seen earlier, this rejection is always circumscribed by the triumph of election). Clearly, to suffer God’s wrath and to be (at least in a qualified sense) rejected by God is perceived by Barth to be a valid possibility for all, Jews and Christians alike. Neither race nor religion can be the cause of such a fate, nor can they prevent it.

Second, the work of God’s wrath is the necessary, but not ultimately decisive, flip-side of God’s grace. Barth writes that Jesus loved the disciples “unto the end”.¹³² This means that, by his death, Jesus bore their punishment and rejection, thus enabling the disciples “to live as those for whom He intercedes, for whose uncleanness He repents, and to whom He gives His purity”.¹³³ For Barth, “[w]hat is revealed in the revelation of wrath” is the delivery and abandonment of the “Gentile”

¹²⁹ *CD* II/2, 484.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 485.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 485-6.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 475.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

to divine punishment.¹³⁴ “But what this involves is not foreign to the love of God.”¹³⁵ On the contrary, it is its necessary counterpart.

Lindsay contends that here “[w]e are reminded of the unequal dialectic of God’s No and Yes, . . . , in which the Yes of election to life triumphs over the No of rejection and wrath. In the ‘Judas passage’ the same idea is expressed through the concept of ‘limitation’; that Jesus’ loving of the disciples ‘unto the end’ involves a circumscription of wrath by divine mercy, grace and salvation.”¹³⁶

For Barth, the triumph of wrath and rejection can only ever be penultimate. If the New Testament refuses to teach ἀποκατάστασις (universal salvation), it also “strikingly fails to make use of the tempting possibility of making Judas a plain and specific example of hopeless rejection and perdition, an embodiment of the temporal and eternal rejection of certain men”.¹³⁷ The rejected Judas, who stands on the graceless side of the cross, is confronted by “the overwhelming power of grace”, in face of which his human wickedness is revealed to be utterly weak.¹³⁸ Barth is unwilling, however, to affirm the ultimate salvation of Judas, stating that the New Testament does not offer a single word to suggest that Judas is an example of ἀποκατάστασις. He prefers instead to keep Judas’ fate in unresolved tension.

Judas, as the representative figure of all Israel, is significant for how Barth understands the rejection of the Jews. Is there, Barth asks, a limitation to the wrath suffered by Israel? Acts 7 appears to indicate at first glance that “there is no such limitation”.¹³⁹ A superficial reading of this section suggests that the “delivery of the fathers is still justified in the case of their children’s children”.¹⁴⁰ However, the Christological conclusion to Acts 7 does in fact imply a “limit to Israel’s punishment”.¹⁴¹ Because “Jesus stands at the right hand of God”, there is a “goal to

¹³⁴ Ibid., 487.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Lindsay, *Covenanted Solidarity: the Theological Basis of Karl Barth’s opposition to Nazi Antisemitism and the Holocaust*, 295.

¹³⁷ CD II/2, 476.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 477.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 487.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

[Israel's] divinely executed rejection, [a] necessary end of its endlessness".¹⁴² Just as for Judas, therefore, the note of punishment and rejection for Israel gives way eschatologically to a note of optimism. If Jesus is Victor, then Israel's rejection is temporally circumscribed. It is true that the love of God deals with those who have been handed over to God's wrath harshly, but:

it really is the love of God which deals with them in this way. From this end He wills to make a fresh beginning with them. He will awaken them from this death which they must die. He will speedily deliver them from this distress, from which there is no escape . . . [E]ven in His stern handing-over He actually means well to Jews and Gentiles . . .¹⁴³

The severity of Barth's expression notwithstanding, Lindsay contends that it must be argued "that Jesus' loving 'unto the end' does not exclude either Judas or, as the people he represents, Israel. The resolution of the dialectic in favour of God's Yes to Israel must . . . stand as the final word."¹⁴⁴

But on what possible basis can this be affirmed? Lindsay continues:

Simply put, it is due to the antecedent work of God in Jesus Christ, in which Jesus is the subject of the primal and genuine handing over. . . . Barth understands Jesus Christ to be the electing God antecedently in himself, and . . . it is according to the divine antecedent will for him to be the true subject of both election and rejection. Now . . . Barth [builds] on this foundation by explaining that Judas' handing over of Jesus came after the original παραδοῦναι.¹⁴⁵

But this does not mean that men and women are not themselves delivered over to God's wrath. "[T]hey, too, must undoubtedly suffer punishment".¹⁴⁶ What this means, however, is that delivery over to God's wrath is part of God's overarching plan to establish a covenantal relationship with the world. How?

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 488.

¹⁴⁴ Lindsay, *Covenantal Solidarity: the Theological Basis of Karl Barth's opposition to Nazi Antisemitism and the Holocaust*, 297.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ CD II/2, 494.

Because the handing over to wrath falls, not primarily upon humanity as a whole, or upon certain individuals, but upon Jesus: "He does not merely execute judgment upon sin. He takes it upon Himself and suffers so that there can be no further question of suffering it ourselves."¹⁴⁷ Or, put in a way that permits no prioritizing of Christians over Jews, Jesus suffers "the suffering of Israel given up to idolatry; the suffering of the Gentiles given up to the lusts of their own hearts; the suffering of Christians given up to Satan".¹⁴⁸ Jesus "alone is delivered up in this way and to this end".¹⁴⁹ The inevitable upshot of this is that only Jesus is the truly Rejected. No one else has been "wholly and exclusively abandoned".¹⁵⁰

Judas has traditionally been interpreted as the archetypal figure of rejection, representing Israel as "those who are handed over and [are] therefore totally lost".¹⁵¹ But Barth's model offers a corrective to this view, insisting upon the "possibility of salvation" for all.¹⁵²

It is in light of Israel's election, then, that Barth's comments about post-biblical Judaism are made. Its creaturely existence is located only in God's faithful preservation of the covenant, where God's lordship over "whatever may take place" in world history is grounded in the belief that providence is the historical actualization of the covenantal reality that God is for all humanity.¹⁵³

For Barth the connection between providence and election is lacking in post-biblical Judaism; it lacks this content and has only abstract knowledge of the history of salvation. Yet because of its role in the salvation of humanity, Barth considers the history of post-biblical Judaism to be one of four "elements" or "signs and witnesses" which affirm that God is "Lord of . . . history" and "King of Israel".¹⁵⁴ The others are the history of Holy Scripture,¹⁵⁵ the history of the Church,¹⁵⁶ and the

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 495.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 496.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 488.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ *CD* III/3, 13

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 200.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 204.

limitation of human life.¹⁵⁷ Of all the phenomena that witness to God's providence the history of the Jews is "the most astonishing and provocative"; of all the four signs, the Jews' history has, in and of itself, "a very special cogency".¹⁵⁸

Barth's understanding of who the Jews are is determined by the two events of Jesus' death and the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus in AD 70. It was after these events that "the real history of the Jews began". "From now on the Jews will be that which they became in the year 70."¹⁵⁹

In other words, in their history post-AD 70, the Jews have shown themselves to be a remarkably resilient people. That the exclusivity that they once enjoyed in their covenant relationship with God has now changed does not negate the fact that "[t]hey are still there".¹⁶⁰ In spite of the rise and fall of world empires, and despite "the destruction and persecution and above all the assimilation and interconnexion and intermingling with other nations the Jews are still there, and permanently there".¹⁶¹ The creation of the "new state of Israel", and its advances culturally, militarily and diplomatically, is further proof of the indestructibility of the Jewish people.¹⁶² Barth also alludes here to the *Shoah*; when he says that the Jews are "usually despised for some obscure reason, and kept apart, and even persecuted and oppressed by every possible spiritual and physical weapon, and frequently exterminated in part".¹⁶³ Yet, even after "the worst disaster in all their history", the Jews are "always and everywhere surviving".¹⁶⁴ This is due solely to the gracious providence and protection of God. This point is elucidated in a radio talk given by Barth on the 13th December 1949. He begins by noting that, after the *Shoah*, the Jews "seem to be in the process of founding a new state in Palestine How have they, all things considered, attained this surprising position of historical permanence, a permanence which increases rather than decreases?" The answer Barth gives is

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 226.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 210.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 211.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 211-2.

¹⁶² Ibid., 212. For an example of Barth's pro-Israeli stance during the Six Day War (5-11th June 1967), see Karl Barth, *Letters 1961-1968*, ed. J. Fangmeier and H. Stoevesandt, trans. and ed. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 256, 260.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

that God is faithful to this people in spite of their unfaithfulness to Him. God, “in the person and by the death of one of these Jews, put an end to the unfaithfulness of His people and to that of all mankind”.¹⁶⁵

Having dealt with the fact of Israel’s preservation, which, he posits, can only be due to God’s providence, Barth proceeds to examine Jewish identity. “We speak of the Jews, and yet in the strict sense we cannot say with any certainty who and what we really mean by the term.”¹⁶⁶ Barth refuses to define Jewishness narrowly by merging all Jews into a seamless stereotype of racial, genetic, linguistic, cultural, religious and historical sameness: “[t]he idea of a specifically Jewish blood is pure imagination”.¹⁶⁷ There is no simplistic way to understand Jewish culture.

“Are the Jews”, then, “really a people at all?”¹⁶⁸ Yes, they are “really and perceptibly there”¹⁶⁹. They are “a people which is not a people”.¹⁷⁰ Barth elucidates this point in his radio talk of December 1949. The Jews are a people unlike any other, whose special characteristic lies in their ability to exist “anonymously, lacking in glory and having no national character of their own”.¹⁷¹

Unlike every other nation, Jewish identity and existence is determined by and based upon election. It is as the genuinely elected nation of God that the Jews are a people. But they are “unfaithful to [their] election”.¹⁷² Because of this unfaithfulness, the history of the Jews displays a negative, shadowy appearance. This, however, is not the final word, as they (the Jews) “did not disappear from world history in the year 70”.¹⁷³ The reason for this lies in the primacy of God’s faithfulness – displayed in Christ – over against Israel’s infidelity:

¹⁶⁵ Karl Barth, “The Jewish Problem and the Christian Answer”, in *Against the Stream: Shorter-Post War Writings 1946-1952*, trans. E. M. Delacour and S. Godman, ed. R.G. Smith (London: SCM, 1954), 196.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 213.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 215.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ Barth, “The Jewish Problem and the Christian Answer”, 197.

¹⁷² *CD III/3*, 219.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 217.

[F]rom the standpoint of the Christian message the reason for this is that God's decree in His election of this people and covenanting with it is an eternal and unshakable decree. The people was an unfaithful people. From the very first it willed to be a people like others, to have a king and a history like others. But this could not alter the faithfulness of God, and it has not altered it right up to the present time. . . . How could it be altered by the judgment in which God finally ratified His grace towards this unworthy partner by Himself taking its place, the judgment of Golgotha? Far from turning aside from His people, far from allowing it to fall, in the One who died for His people and for all men God not merely turned towards it but accepted solidarity with it. His appointment and constitution of Israel as the bearer of light and salvation to all nations are actualised in the death and revealed in the resurrection of the One who is the remnant of the Jewish remnant of Israel, and who definitely died and rose again on behalf of this remnant, indeed of Israel as a whole.¹⁷⁴

Thus, in their unfaithfulness, the Jews deny the very thing which makes them a people. But the faithfulness of God to Israel's election imposes a limit on the negation of the Jews' existence and identity. As a result, the final word must be that the Jews are indeed a people. Indeed they are not only *a* people, but through the grace of God, they are "the people of God".¹⁷⁵ There is no other valid definition of their identity.

Now that Barth has established the unique determination of the Jews' existence and identity, as the continuing elected people of God, he comes to the final part of the section, which deals with "the origins of anti-Semitism".¹⁷⁶ Significantly, this too is due to Israel's election. Because they are the elect of God and therefore, like Abraham, Moses and Jesus, are strangers to the world, having "no home, no city, no temple", the Jews "have always been looked upon with disfavour. They have been unloved and despised and hated."¹⁷⁷ And yet this is not how it should be. Such hatred of the Jews is irrational, as nothing about the Jews makes them "objectively

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. Michael Wyschogrod endorses Barth's view, both in terms of Israel's sinfulness and in terms of God's loves for the Jews in spite of this disobedience. Hence he says that the "discovery of Israel's sinfulness is one thing when it comes from a Christian theologian who believes that Israel has been superseded by the Church and that Israel's sorrows are the result of its obstinacy. It is something entirely different when it comes from a Christian theologian with roots in Judaism as deep as those of Barth." See Michael Wyschogrod, "A Jewish Perspective on Karl Barth", in *How Karl Barth Changed My Mind*, ed. D. K. McKim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 159.

¹⁷⁵ CD III/3, 218.

¹⁷⁶ Barth, "The Jewish Problem and the Christian Answer", 198.

¹⁷⁷ CD III/3, 220.

worse, or harder to tolerate, than other peoples".¹⁷⁸ Indeed, "all people have their unpleasant characteristics".¹⁷⁹ Why, then, can these be forgiven but "we can never pardon those of the Jews?".¹⁸⁰

Barth's answer is the universal sinfulness of humanity. "[I]n the Jew we have revealed and shown to us in a mirror who and what we all are, and how bad we all are."¹⁸¹ It is "revealed in this people what man is, man in his relationship with God, man before the judgment seat of God, sinful man".¹⁸² Thus, "[o]ur annoyance is not really with the Jew himself. It is with the Jew only because and to the extent that the Jew is a mirror in which we immediately recognize ourselves, in which all the nations recognise themselves as they are before the judgment seat of God."¹⁸³ In our encounter with Israel, we see that we too are "manifestly the enemies of God".¹⁸⁴

But this "depresses us", and as a reaction to recognizing ourselves before the judgment of God "we deem it necessary to punish the stranger [the Jew] in our midst, with contempt scorn and hatred", as if by smashing the mirror we could alter the truth about ourselves which we see in it.¹⁸⁵ This is the "most wrong-headed thing we could do!"¹⁸⁶ By smashing the mirror – that is, by persecuting the Jews and, therefore, assaulting God – we prove that we are the enemies of God.

In the Jews, "we are positively confronted with the fact of God's electing grace".¹⁸⁷ Despite the torments of their history, the Jews remain because the grace of God has sustained them. On the one hand, Barth believes that this provokes the jealousy of non-Jews because, having been upheld by God, "the Jews can do something which we cannot do. And this fact irritates us, and the more so because we cannot explain why they can do it."¹⁸⁸ He writes further: "In their persistence the Jews are absolutely exceptional, and they obviously surpass us. . . . [W]e see only

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 221

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 222.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Barth, "The Jewish Problem and the Christian Answer", 198-199.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 199.

¹⁸⁷ CD III/3, 223.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 224.

too clearly that placed in the same unfavourable conditions we could never have achieved the same persistence. . . . [T]hey are obviously preserved in such a way which cannot be said for other peoples.”¹⁸⁹ But, on the other hand, the electing grace of God, which is reflected in the Jews, shows that the existence of the non-Jewish nations is more than a little perilous. If it has only been by God’s providence that the Jews have survived, and if the Jews alone are the elected nation of God, how then can non-Jewish nations hope to survive? “The existence of the Jews tells us that in world history there seems to be neither security nor permanent abiding place for any nation or for any individual.”¹⁹⁰

The only answer then for the nations is to be subject, alongside Israel, to the grace and election of God. Because, however, “the elect of God is not a German or a Swiss or a Frenchman, but this Jew . . .”, and because “divine election is a particular election [such] that we ourselves have been completely overlooked in the particularity of this divine election”, our election and, therefore, our security in God’s grace “can only be in and with this other”.¹⁹¹ In other words, “[s]alvation is of the Jews”.¹⁹²

If the grace and mercy and long-suffering of God are to be with humanity, if humanity is to remain, to persist, and to be preserved, it cannot possibly avoid this other, for the goodness of God can be to humanity only as it is first to him, and to humanity only in and through him.¹⁹³

The “other” of whom Barth is speaking here is of course “the one Jew Jesus Christ”,¹⁹⁴ who “looks down on us; the Jew on the Cross, in whom salvation is for every man”.¹⁹⁵

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Barth, “The Jewish Problem and the Christian Answer”, 199.

¹⁹¹ *CD* III/3, 225.

¹⁹² Barth, “The Jewish Problem and the Christian Answer”, 200.

¹⁹³ *CD* III/3, 225-6.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 226.

¹⁹⁵ Barth, “The Jewish Problem and the Christian Answer”, 200.

A Critique of Barth's Theology of Israel: Its import for an encounter with Islam
David Fergusson has described Barth's discussion of Israel as "rich, complex and ambivalent".¹⁹⁶ It is the case, as Fergusson points out, that some concepts within the Barthian corpus point toward "earlier anti-Semitic tropes":

Judas (and behind him the Old Testament figure of Saul) is the type of the rejected in whom we see mirrored our own sin, pettiness, self-righteousness and rebellion. The synagogue, in its persistence across history, attests human stubbornness before the grace and demand of God.¹⁹⁷

Barth himself once confessed to Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt that he was "decidedly not a philosemite".¹⁹⁸ In any personal encounters he had with "living Jews (even Jewish Christians)", Barth recounts that he had to "suppress a totally irrational aversion" towards them, explaining this to Marquardt as a sort of "allergic reaction".¹⁹⁹

The oft quoted "ambivalence"²⁰⁰ of Barth's theology of Israel has led some scholars to accuse him of being *supersessionist*, a term that "is tainted by the implication of anti-Semitism and its terrible consequences".²⁰¹ R. Kendall Soulen, for example, suggests that Barth's view of election remains "profoundly supersessionistic", for Barth understands Israel as "that part of the one community of Jesus Christ that is elected in order to be rejected and to pass away".²⁰²

Supersessionism, as defined by Hunsinger, is "the idea that Israel has been replaced as God's people by the church. By rejecting Jesus as the Messiah, Israel allegedly forfeited its divine election. Along with certain corollaries (e.g., that the old covenant is nullified by the new), this notion has played a tragic role in the church's

¹⁹⁶ David A. S. Fergusson, "Contemporary Christian Theological Reflection on Land and Covenant", in *Theology of Land and Covenant*, a report to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland of May 2003 (Edinburgh: The Church of Scotland Board of Practice and Procedure, 2003), 13.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Barth, *Letters 1961-1968*, 262.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Sonderegger, *That Jesus Christ was born a Jew: Karl Barth's "Doctrine of Israel"*, 6.

²⁰¹ George Hunsinger, "Introduction", in *For the sake of the World: Karl Barth and the Future of Ecclesial Theology*, ed. George Hunsinger (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 3.

²⁰² R. K. Soulen, "YHWH The Triune God", *Modern Theology* 15 (1999), 40-1. See also R. K. Soulen, "Karl Barth and the Future of the God is Israel", *Pro Ecclesia* 6.4 (1997), 413-28.

historic persecution of Jews.”²⁰³ It can be argued that Barth is not supersessionist in any classical sense. Barth himself states categorically that “Israel’s mission” is not “superseded”. He notes that “through everything the Old Testament again and again insists that God’s election holds and will hold to all eternity”.²⁰⁴ It is therefore plausible to agree with Hunsinger when he writes:

Barth is as responsible as anyone in recent theology for recovering the normative apostolic teaching that God has not rejected his people, that God’s gifts and promises are irrevocable, and that all Israel will be saved (Rom. 11:1-2, 26, 29).²⁰⁵

An alternative to supersessionism is the idea of “dividing Jews and Gentiles into two parallel covenants”.²⁰⁶ Hunsinger explains this position thus:

If Jews have perhaps been unfaithful to the covenant in one way, Christians will have been so in another. Since divine faithfulness overrides all human disobedience (Rom. 3:3-7), the election of the Jews is ultimately assured, as is the subsequent extension of election to the Gentile church. Because both are covenant partners of the one electing God, neither can be more or less legitimate than the other.²⁰⁷

Barth rejects this “two-track view”, believing instead that Christians and Jews are in God’s one covenant of grace.²⁰⁸ For Barth the “two-track view” just does not square with the New Testament and in particular Romans 9-11.²⁰⁹ The Christian

²⁰³ Hunsinger, “Introduction”, *For the sake of the World: Karl Barth and the Future of Ecclesial Theology*, 3.

²⁰⁴ Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, trans. G. T. Thomson (London: S. C. M. Press, 1949), 79.

²⁰⁵ Hunsinger, “Introduction”, *For the sake of the World: Karl Barth and the Future of Ecclesial Theology*, 4.

²⁰⁶ Scott Bader-Saye, *Church and Israel After Christendom: The Politics of Election* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999), 96.

²⁰⁷ Hunsinger, “Introduction”, *For the sake of the World: Karl Barth and the Future of Ecclesial Theology*, 4. An example of the “one covenant in two forms” view is the theology of Paul Van Buren. See Paul Van Buren, *Christ in context: a theology of the Jewish-Christian reality*, vol. 3 (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988). Van Buren is clearly influenced by the work of Franz Rosenzweig, who insisted that Christianity was an outgrowth of Judaism. This outgrowth, however, cannot revert and consume its own roots without destroying its own true foundation. In his vivid symbolism Rosenzweig compared Israel to the sun and the Christian Church to its rays: the sun transcends its rays, even though the rays extend far beyond the position of the sun itself. See Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. W. W. Hallo (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971), 298-379.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

community of Gentiles and Jews that accepts Jesus as the Messiah does not “supersede” the Jewish community that does not accept Jesus as the Messiah. What it does do, however, is to offer the proper human response to the ultimate fulfilment of the covenant as divinely appointed in Jesus. The community that fails to accept Jesus as the Messiah does not lose its election (as in “supersessionism”), but by definition excludes itself – albeit *provisionally*.²¹⁰ Barth’s *biblically based position*²¹¹ holds therefore that Christians and Jews stand in “indissoluble unity”.²¹² “To this complex eschatological situation, a term like ‘supersessionism’ is irrelevant”.²¹³

A strong critique of Barth is triggered by his description of the synagogue as part of “that dark and monstrous side of Israel’s history,” which is disobedient and idolatrous towards God.²¹⁴ He portrays the synagogue as the enemy of God which practices Jewish obstinacy to the Gospel. It is “the personification of a half-venerable, half-gruesome relic, of a miraculously preserved antique, of human whimsicality” unwilling to take up the message “ ‘He [Christ] is Risen!’ ”.²¹⁵ This leads Sonderegger to contrast a portrait of Barth as a political supporter of Israel with a portrait of him as an anti-Jewish theologian attached to his anti-Jewish presuppositions. She argues that while Barth has a deep interest in Jews, he has almost no interest in Judaism. She writes:

The solidarity between Christians and Jews that Barth so vigorously advocates is based upon the quiet assumption that Judaism does not exist. Jews exist, the people Israel exist, even the synagogue exists in error, but Judaism – an independent religious system and institution – does not.²¹⁶

²¹⁰ Ibid., 5.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² See Eberhard Busch, “Indissoluble unity: Barth’s position on the Jews during the Hitler Era”, in *For the sake of the World: Karl Barth and the Future of Ecclesial Theology*, ed. George Hunsinger (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 53-79.

²¹³ Hunsinger, “Introduction”, *For the sake of the World: Karl Barth and the Future of Ecclesial Theology*, 5.

²¹⁴ CD II/2, 287.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 263.

²¹⁶ Sonderegger, *That Jesus was born a Jew: Karl Barth’s “Doctrine of Israel”*, 142. This opinion seems to be reinforced by Barth himself when, in his correspondence with Marquardt, he writes, “Biblical Israel gave me so much to think about and to cope with that I simply did not have the time or intellectual strength to look more closely at Baeck, Buber, Rosenzweig, etc.”. See Barth, *Letters 1961-1968*, 262.

Sonderegger contends that while Barth retains a place for Israel in the economy of salvation, it is as the negative counterpoint to the Church. The Jewish people exist because the promises of God are irrevocable and the Jews remain elect *in spite of* their blindness. Barth's theology therefore, while being non-supersessionist, incorporates anti-Semitic tropes.

Sonderegger rightly claims that Paul's letter to the Romans, and in particular chapters 9-11, provides that background for Barth's controversial remarks about Judaism.²¹⁷ Barth's theology makes the association that present day Jews and Judaism are to be seen in the light cast by these biblical verses. However the Judaism known by Paul is *categorically* different from the latter-day Judaism that persists today without the temple. Rabbinic Judaism as it is known today is a completely different religious system. It does not fall within the scope of Paul's argument in Romans 9-11.²¹⁸

Sonderegger rightly cautions the reader not to make the association between biblical and rabbinical Judaism as quickly or directly as Barth arguably has done. Contemporary Judaism and Jewish practice, are post-biblical and rabbinic – they are Judaism without “temple worship”.²¹⁹

²¹⁷ Katherine Sonderegger, “Response to Indissoluble Unity”, in *For the sake of the World: Karl Barth and the Future of Ecclesial Theology*, ed. George Hunsinger (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 82.

²¹⁸ This argument also gives insight into Barth's support for the state of Israel and its victory in the Six Day War. Was the state of Israel Barth supported in the 1960's simply the continuation for him of biblical Israel? Even for many Jews today, some of Israel's policies have become difficult to accept, e.g. Jewish settlements in the “occupied” West Bank, the policy of “targeted killings” of enemies of the state, and the building of walls and systematic ghettoization of Gaza and the West Bank. Would Barth be silent about the plight of the Palestinian people today?

²¹⁹ Sonderegger, “Response to Indissoluble Unity”, 82. For Christians the destruction of the temple by the Romans brought the biblical period to a close. A.D. 70 marks the end of the Judaism of Jesus and Paul, the end of the priesthood and temple protocol and the end of Judaism as a religion that practiced sacrifice. “[R]abbinic Judaism . . . began in the aftermath of this destruction, and . . . is characterized by a new system of text and practice This is a different religious system than Second Temple Judaism, though it derives from it; a different religious system than Christianity, though it bears family resemblance.” See Sonderegger, “Response to Indissoluble Unity”, 84. Sonderegger describes Christianity and Judaism as “doublets” – “two identities separate yet mirroring each other”; each must “retain their separate identities”. Inherent in these separate identities is criticism of the other. See Sonderegger, *That Jesus was born a Jew: Karl Barth's “Doctrine of Israel”*, 178-9.

In a parallel vein, one should not make the hasty assumption that Islam is, in Barth's words, a "paganised" form of "the semi biblical religion of post-Christian Judaism".²²⁰ As has been shown, Barth had very little interest in or understanding of Islam throughout most of his life, except in its guise as a threat to Medieval Christendom, which he used as a cipher for National Socialism and as an example of absolute monotheism.²²¹ This is consistent with his general disinterest in and impressionistic understanding of world religions in general. It could also be argued that Barth's limited understanding of Islam as a "paganised" form of post-Christian Judaism corresponds to his residual anti-Semitism. This can be seen most clearly in his understanding of Ishmael, which in many ways parallels his understanding of the Synagogue.

Ishmael, who according to Islamic tradition is the progenitor of the Arab nations and, along with Abraham, the co-founder of the Ka'bah (the central sanctuary of Allah) in Mecca, is described by Barth as being excluded by God in favour of Isaac as the "repetition and establishment" of God's election of Abraham.²²² But Ishmael is not rejected because of some fault of his own. Consequently Barth recounts that Ishmael is not forsaken by God, but instead will in time become the founder of a great nation.²²³ For Barth, Ishmael is clearly aligned with the "refractory Synagogue" of those who are rejected within elected Israel.²²⁴ But like that of Judas, Ishmael's rejection is "superceded and limited"²²⁵ because of Jesus Christ, "who died on the cross for the justification of God".²²⁶ In fact, the future of the lost people of Israel, which according to Barth's logic must include Muslims as *paganised Jews*, is present in the calling "of the Gentiles", which – according to Barth – justifies "the God of Israel even as the God of Ishmael".²²⁷ Theologically, then, it would seem that the Church not only justifies the future of Jews but also justifies the future of Muslims. This contention is strengthened by Barth himself when he encourages the reader "to recognise Jesus Christ not only in

²²⁰ CD III/3, 28.

²²¹ This point was emphasised to the author in a conversation he had with Hans Küng in Tübingen, August 2006.

²²² CD II/2, 214,

²²³ Ibid., 216-7.

²²⁴ Ibid., 217.

²²⁵ Ibid., 226

²²⁶ Ibid., 223.

²²⁷ Ibid., 231.

the type of . . . Isaac and his sacrifice but also in the very different type of Ishmael and his expulsion and miraculous protection . . . not only in the type of the Israelite nation but also in the very different type of the excluded and yet not utterly excluded heathen nations".²²⁸

Conclusion

Even with Barth's misplaced association between biblical and post-biblical Judaism and his residual anti-Semitism, he sees the existence of Judaism today as a sign of hope for the salvation of all. In this sense Lindsay is right to argue that "for Barth the Church has no genuine independence as the people of God apart from the Synagogue".²²⁹ But this view should also be extended to include a mutual dependence between the Mosque and the Church.

While there is negative stereotyping of both Judaism and Islam in Barth's works there are other resources available within the same corpus to overcome this difficulty and to recognise the aforementioned dependency. One such resource is provided by Barth's account of extra-ecclesial truth in his Doctrine of Reconciliation, in particular his discussion in §69.2 entitled "The Light of Life".²³⁰ While one must concede that Barth did not "develop a specifically Israelite contour"²³¹ in this paragraph, in order to build a relationship between Judaism and Islam on the one hand and Christianity on the other, nevertheless there are however mechanisms within these few pages which can help the Church recognise Jesus Christ in both

²²⁸ Ibid., 366.

²²⁹ Mark R. Lindsay, *Barth, Israel and Jesus: Karl Barth's Theology of Israel* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 105.

²³⁰ In a paper delivered to the Karl Barth Society of North America on Friday 17th November 2006 in Washington D.C., Wolf Krötke observed that the beginning part of a deleted paragraph of the *Church Dogmatics* entitled "God and the gods" presents an early form (some fifteen years early in fact) of the "doctrine of the little lights" found in §69.2 of CD IV/3. Here, in this paragraph, the question about revelations of God in the creaturely world is set within the context of the theme of "God and the gods". In contrast to the "*Lichterlehre*" to which we will attend in chapter 4, this discussion is explicitly set within the context of the religions. Krötke argues that "if this 'doctrine of the little lights' is valid, these religions can scarcely be thought to wander about in creation entirely outside the revelations of God . . . At least an 'impression' of God is to be anticipated in the world." See Wolf Krötke, "A New Impetus to the Theology of Religion from Karl Barth's Thought", paper presented to the Karl Barth Society of North America on 17th November 2006 in Washington D.C. (and forthcoming in the *Scottish Journal of Theology*).

²³¹ Paul Chung, "Karl Barth's Theology of Israel: An Impasse in Jewish-Christian Relations", www.plts.edu/articles/articles.html.

Judaism and Islam. Chapter 3 will argue that this paragraph provides the Church with criteria to receive words of the Kingdom from other religions. Chapter 4 will argue that this paragraph can also provide the Church with an arena for inter-religious encounter.

CHAPTER 3

Truth *extra muros ecclesiae* I – “secular words” of the Kingdom: providing the Church with criteria to receive words from other religions

Introduction

Though Barth’s disturbing characterising of Islam is analogous to his residual anti-Semitism, there exists in principle for Barth the possibility of witness to the revelation of the Word of God occurring outside the confines of the Church. This chapter will argue that this possibility includes witness which may come from within the context of either rabbinic Judaism or Islam.

Barth’s concept of “secular words” of the Kingdom provides the Church with criteria in order to receive words from other religions – by evaluating them and by determining what use the Church is to make of them. Access to this revelation is wholly dependent on the divine initiative whereby God *commandeers* secular words and words from other religions to become “parables of the kingdom”.¹ Such witness to the revelation of God occurs then in an “*ad hoc* and ephemeral” way.² Hence Barth’s concept provides theological justification to conceive how the words (and actions) of Judaism and Islam might be affirmed as “signs” or “parables” of Jesus Christ.

Witness to the revelation of the kingdom of the Word occurring outside the confines of the Church

In the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, Karl Barth argues that one must be cautious when considering the question of the possibility of witness to revelation *extra muros ecclesiae*. On the one hand, he is unwilling to side quickly with Luther and Calvin in their vehement condemnation of Zwingli for being so eager “to people the Christian heaven with a whole series of noble pagans”.³ For Barth, “[t]o shout ‘Impossible’ might be a sign of culpable obduracy”.⁴ The Christian has “properly no reason to maintain the absoluteness of Christianity. It is revelation that is absolute.”⁵ Yet, on

¹ Paul Louis Metzger, *The Word of Christ and the World of Culture: Sacred and Secular through the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 125.

² *Ibid.*, 127.

³ Barth, *Göttingen Dogmatics*, 149-50.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁵ *Ibid.*

the other hand, he is quick to point out that if “pagans” are to meet the test of bearing witness to the truth, it must be shown that they bear witness to:

the one revelation at all events, that is, indirect communication of the hidden God who is as such the revealed God, God’s encounter with us, and hence the cross and the resurrection, offense and faith. This is the issue in the canon, in the OT and the NT. This is what the witness to revelation, to the incarnation, to Christ, is all about.⁶

It does not make sense then “to shut the gates of the castle”, nor “to tear down the gates as though this were always self-evidently the issue throughout religious history”.⁷

While Barth does not rule out the possibility of witnesses to God arising outside the walls of the Church, all such witnesses must be ruled by the particularity of the “indirect communication” of God, the incarnation, that is, revelation in Jesus Christ.⁸ The scandal of the particularity of revelation is “the criterion by which to judge potential claims. But the indirectness of revelation as the incarnation proves equally scandalous from another angle in that it negates the possibility of accessibility to this revelation by means of a supposed native capacity for revelation. Accessibility to revelation is wholly dependent upon the divine Word’s condescension in the event of revelation.”⁹

Paul Louis Metzger observes that Protestant thought has traditionally been marked by its emphasis on the Word of God.¹⁰ Such is the case for Barth, “whose theology can be described as a theology of the Word, namely, the living Word as witnessed to by the Word’s written and spoken forms”.¹¹ Stuart McLean is in concert with Metzger when he writes, “Barth implies that the auditory and the temporal analogies more faithfully depict the essential character of the relationships between God and man, and man and man” than do “visual” and “spatial” ones. Stuart McLean writes, “[i]t is not incidental that Barth’s thought stresses the

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Metzger, *The Word of Christ and the World of Culture*, 122.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

importance of the Word and preaching, and Roman Catholic thought, substance and the beatific vision".¹²

Metzger contends that Barth's theology of the Word goes hand in hand with his rejection of the *analogia entis*.¹³ Metzger explains that Barth rejects the analogy of being because he (Barth) believes the concept "expresses a form of relation whereby static, necessary, substantial threads of continuity exist between God and the creation, including an innate capacity of the mind for apprehension of things divine".¹⁴ For Barth the analogy between God and the world is an *event* of language: "As God creates all things out of nothing by his Word, so too, he *creates* analogies between himself and the world by that same Word in the history of revelation. In this light, Barth replaces the *analogia entis* with the *analogia fidei*."¹⁵

The *analogia fidei* expresses that event wherein God in God's grace *creates* correspondence between Godself and that reality which is totally different from God. This event of correspondence endures only so long as God sustains it. McCormack argues that the *analogia fidei* is "an inherently dialectical concept", signifying the veiling and unveiling of God in both the event of revelation and the witness to that revelation.¹⁶ The incarnation of God in history in the person of Jesus Christ both wholly reveals God and wholly hides God at the same time.

Exposition of §69.2 – the "parables of the kingdom"

Barth's treatment of "parables of the kingdom" forms part of his broader analysis of the prophetic work of Christ. As Barth elucidates Christ as prophet, it becomes clear that he has retained the exclusivist focus on Jesus found in §17 ("The revelation of God as the abolition of religion"). "Jesus Christ is *the* light of life," he proclaims.¹⁷ "To underline the 'the' is to say that He is the one and only light of life. Positively, this means that He is the light of life in all its fullness, in perfect adequacy; and

¹² Stuart McLean, *Humanity in the Thought of Karl Barth* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1981), 13.

¹³ Metzger, *The Word of Christ and the World of Culture*, 123.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 16-8.

¹⁷ CD IV/3, 86.

negatively, it means that there is no other light of life outside or alongside His, outside or alongside the light which He is.”¹⁸

Alternatively, “Jesus Christ as attested to us in Holy Scripture is the one Word of God whom we must hear.”¹⁹ Barth recognizes that this claim is “a hard and offensive saying which provokes doubt and invites contradiction”.²⁰ But he is careful immediately to highlight that this exclusivity does not eliminate but *delimits* “what is also to be said of other prophets, teachers and witnesses of the truth, or of the prophecy entrusted to the Christian community and each individual Christian”.²¹ None of these prophecies are themselves the one Word of God. This is even more the case, says Barth, of the “outside sphere” where “even though it is perhaps incontestable that there are real lights of life and words of God, . . . He alone is the Word of God . . . and these lights shine only because of the shining of none other light than His”.²² Barth summaries his position:

We recognise that the fact that Jesus Christ is the one Word of God does not mean that in the Bible, the Church and the world there are not other words which are quite notable in their way, other lights which are quite clear and other revelations which are quite real.²³

Firstly, to say that Jesus Christ is the one Word of God means that “He is the total and complete declaration of God concerning Himself and the men whom He addresses in His Word.”²⁴ This does not mean, of course, that what Christians say about Jesus is identical to the one Word of God. Jesus Christ may be the complete and final revelation of God, but “our hearing of [His Word] is profoundly incomplete”.²⁵ While both the Bible and the message, life and activity of the Church bear witness to the fact that Jesus Christ is the one Word of God, they are not themselves the Word of God. Secondly, that Jesus is the one Word of God means that His truth “is not exposed on any third side to any serious competition, any

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 87.

²¹ Ibid., 86.

²² Ibid., 96.

²³ Ibid., 97.

²⁴ Ibid., 99.

²⁵ Ibid.

challenge to His truth, any threat to His authority”.²⁶ Third, one may not make God’s Word in Jesus Christ part of a supposedly broader system, which encompasses that Word and other words. Such attempts at systematization “imply a control over Him to which none of us has any right, which can be only the work of religious arrogance”.²⁷ Finally, to assert that Jesus Christ is the one Word of God implies the finality of this Word: “His prophecy cannot be transcended by any other”.²⁸ One does not expect new and different words, which will supersede what has been said and done in Jesus.

The proclamation that Jesus Christ is the one Word of God does not grant any special privilege or status to the proclaimer. The proclamation “looks away from the non-Christian and Christian alike to the One who sovereignly confronts and precedes both as *the* Prophet. As Jesus Christ is its content, the one who confesses it in no sense marks himself off from those who do not.”²⁹

The claim that Jesus is *the* light of life, that he is the one true Word of God, of necessity raises the question of the truth of all human words, for “can we think of any word actually spoken, or any conceivable word which might be spoken, that says what the life of Jesus Christ says?”³⁰ Are there in fact such “true words” distinct from the one Word of God, Jesus Christ? At this point Barth introduces the concept of “parables of the kingdom”. Whereas the kingdom of God *is* Jesus Christ, human words can, by God’s grace, disclose the kingdom. As such, the secular words of the world become parables of the kingdom. All parables of the kingdom are similar to those parables of Christ in the gospels. Although the parables of Jesus themselves arise from the “everyday sphere”, the characters employed by Jesus “are very strangely shaped, and their actions no less strangely directed, by an invisible hand which obviously estranges them from the everyday sphere in which they are set”.³¹ Jesus employs the ordinary, giving “them the mark of the extraordinary”.³² “The one true Word of God makes these other words true”, Barth explains. “Jesus Christ

²⁶ Ibid., 100.

²⁷ Ibid., 101.

²⁸ Ibid., 102.

²⁹ Ibid., 91.

³⁰ Ibid., 107.

³¹ Ibid., 112.

³² Ibid., 113.

utters, or rather creates, these parables, speaking of the kingdom, of the life, and therefore of Himself, and doing so in stories which it might seem that others could tell, yet which they are unable to do, because His Word alone can equate the kingdom with such events.”³³ Hunsinger notes that the very words Barth deploys in discussing the truth of human words about God – “signs”, “parables”, and “attestations” – indicate their provisional status.³⁴

One set of “parables of the kingdom” is found in Scripture and the Church’s proclamation. The word of witness as Scripture is entitled the “direct witness”, whereas the word of witness in the Church is labelled the “indirect witness”, reflecting the relative proximity of each to the Word of Christ.³⁵ Scripture, Barth argues, is true to the extent that it is directed and guided by the Word, while Church proclamation is true insofar as it receives its shape from Scripture.³⁶ One must stress yet again that Scripture and Church proclamation in and of themselves are not God’s Word. They can only *become* so to the extent that they are taken up into Jesus Christ by His free, gracious action.

But what of parables of the kingdom, true words of God, extra muros ecclesiae: can they exist?

In response to the first question, of the possibility of the existence of secular “parables of the kingdom”, Barth gives an unequivocal affirmation. If Scripture and Church proclamation constitute an “inner sphere” of a circle with Christ as the centre, then the secular world constitutes an “outer sphere”: true words can be found in both.³⁷ To deny this possibility is tantamount to trying to control God’s free grace. “Does it not necessarily lead to ossification”, Barth asks, “if the community rejects in advance the existence and word of these alien witnesses to the truth?”³⁸ There are no *prima facie* theological reasons, Barth asserts:

not to accept the fact that such good words may also be spoken *extra muros ecclesiae* either through those who have not yet received any effective witness to Jesus Christ, and cannot therefore be reckoned

³³ Ibid., 112.

³⁴ Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, 260.

³⁵ CD IV/3, 96.

³⁶ Ibid., 114.

³⁷ Ibid., 97.

³⁸ Ibid., 115.

with the believers who for their part attest Him, or through more or less admitted Christians who are not, however, engaged in direct confession, or direct activity as members of the Christian community, but in the discharge of a function in world society and its orders and tasks.³⁹

To reject out of hand the possibility of secular parables of God's Word would be to dictate from a human standpoint what is and is not possible for God. If one cannot rule out *a priori* the possible existence of secular parables of the kingdom, one must still ask what the positive theological basis is from which Barth can count on the existence of these parables. One can expect such words in the secular sphere, he asserts, on the basis of the universality of Christ's Lordship and the objective and universal reconciliation effected in and through Him. Barth reminds his reader that "according to the witness of His prophets and apostles grounded in His resurrection, the sphere of His dominion and Word is in any case greater than that of their prophecy and apostolate".⁴⁰

Barth distinguishes between two types of secularism: "between a secularism which approximates to a pure and absolute form and another which is mixed and relative".⁴¹ Absolute or pure secularism refers to those who "stand unwittingly in full isolation from the Gospel in its biblical and churchly form" and whose "reaction to it" would likely "be hostile".⁴² Relative secularism, on the other hand, denotes nominal Christianity.⁴³ Barth adds that it is possible, contrary to what might be assumed, that the nominally secular sphere may actually be more resistant to the gospel, given its familiarity with and ability to acquiesce to the Word in certain ways while in other ways remaining virtually unaffected by the Word due to its subtle opposition to the gospel. Regardless, the Word as Jesus Christ is able to raise up witnesses both from the "closer" and "more distant periphery" of this "narrow sphere".⁴⁴ Because of Christ, Barth holds out hope for the twofold secular dimension, since "for Him neither the militant godlessness of the outer periphery of the community, nor the intricate heathenism of the inner, is an insurmountable

³⁹ Ibid., 110.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 116.

⁴¹ Ibid., 118.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 119-20.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 118.

barrier”.⁴⁵ Because no “Promethianism can be effectively maintained against Jesus Christ”, there can be “no secular sphere abandoned by Him or withdrawn from His control”.⁴⁶ The Word is able to commandeer these words just as He does those of Scripture and the Church. What unites the manifold forms of witness that arise from within these various spheres is their inclusion in Christ by grace. What distinguishes them is their relative proximity to the Word coupled with their awareness or unawareness of their inclusion.

Christians must not take any pride in themselves for proclaiming Jesus Christ, because witnesses to revelation, whether sacred or secular, are not by nature able to bear witness to God or God’s Word. As Barth writes,

Nothing could be further from our minds than to attribute to the human creature as such a capacity to know God and the one Word of God, or to produce true words corresponding to this knowledge. Even in the sphere of the Bible and the Church there can be no question of any such capacity. If there are true words of God, it is all miraculous. How much more so, then, in this wider field! What we have in both cases is the capacity of Jesus Christ to raise up of the stones children to Abraham, i.e., to take into His service, to empower for this service, to cause to speak in it, men who are quite without any capacity of their own.⁴⁷

Barth develops the Augustinian distinction between the visible and invisible Church to warn the Church not to assume complacently any position of privilege over the world:

If the Church is visible, this need not imply that we actually see it in its full compass, that the dimensions of its sphere might not be very different from what we think we know them to be. God may suddenly be pleased to have Abraham blessed by Melchizidek, or Israel blessed by Balaam or helped by Cyrus. Moreover, it could hardly be denied that God can speak His Word to man quite otherwise than through the talk about Himself that is to be found in the Church as known or as yet to be discovered, and therefore quite otherwise than through proclamation. He can establish the Church anew and directly when and where and how it pleases Him.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Ibid., 121.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 119.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 118.

⁴⁸ CD I/1, 54.

Not only should Christ's lordship over all of creation prompt one to expect secular parables of the kingdom, but the objective and universal character of His salvific work should lead the Christian to the same expectation: "[D]e iure all men and all creation derive from His cross, from the reconciliation accomplished in Him, and are ordained to be the theatre of His glory and therefore the recipients and bearers of His Word."⁴⁹ One need not, then, have recourse to a natural theology to claim that true words can be found outside of Church walls: secular parables can be grounded exclusively in the revelation of Christ. That secular parables of the kingdom have their basis in Christ's lordship and atoning work and not in some general revelation available universally is underscored by the fact that these parables are spoken by people "quite apart from and even in the face of their own knowledge or volition, something which they could never be of themselves, namely His witnesses".⁵⁰ The parables in this secular sphere are, in Hunsinger's words, "unwitting witnesses".⁵¹

Because secular parables of the kingdom are grounded not in the subjectivity of those who speak them but in the objectivity of God's reconciling work in and through Jesus Christ, reconciliation for Barth is itself revelation.⁵²

We cannot first speak generally and abstractly of the fact that revelation, as the revelation of the reconciliation of the world to God, takes place (as it did and will take place), and then come back to Him as the One who is perhaps no more than the prominent Revealer.⁵³

Barth goes on to say that, "[a]s the reconciliation takes place in Him, its revelation takes place through Him".⁵⁴ Christ the reconciler lives. And because he lives, "He is His own authentic Witness". Moreover, he alone is responsible for creating knowledge of his life, "making it actual and therefore possible".⁵⁵ Not only does he actualize witness to revelation from within the sphere of the Church, but he

⁴⁹ CD IV/3, 117.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 118.

⁵¹ Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, 265.

⁵² CD IV/3, 38.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 38-9

⁵⁵ Ibid., 46.

also actualizes witness from without given that he himself bears witness to his own life of paramount glory and power.

At the close of his subsection on parables of the kingdom Barth writes:

Reduced to the simplest formula, what we have said is that Jesus Christ was, is and will be the light of life, and because the light of life, of His own reconciling life, therefore and to that extent the one light incomparable in its majesty and authority.⁵⁶

For Barth, Jesus Christ is pre-existent to the historical person called by that name. The historicity of Jesus' life, Barth emphasizes, is real. But, as George Hunsinger has observed, Barth's Jesus is not fully reducible to His historicity:

. . . he is not encapsulated in this historicity in an unqualified way. For his historicity is indissolubly connected with his eternity. It is therefore at once affirmed, negated, and reconstituted on a higher plane. Its mere historicity is transcended and overcome. Its distinctive particularity is at once preserved and yet overcome by, being integrated into the perichoresis of eternity. It is made integral to the eternal life of Jesus Christ and therefore acquires a differentiated presence and distinctive power in relation to all other historical moments and beings.⁵⁷

The key term in Hunsinger's analysis is "perichoresis". Because Jesus Christ's humanity takes part in the Trinitarian interplay and its communication of properties, it shares in all of the qualities of the three "persons" of the Trinity. Thus, for example, Barth can speak of Jesus Christ as the "ground of divine immanence".⁵⁸ Because Jesus Christ is this basis of the divine immanence throughout history and creation, "nothing is to be conceived in which Jesus Christ is not coinherent and, which in turn is not somehow coinherent in him."⁵⁹ Hunsinger proposes the image of a circle to grasp Barth's Christology on this point. Christ forms not only the centre, but also the outer edge: "Center and periphery . . . are regarded as two forms of

⁵⁶ Ibid., 135.

⁵⁷ Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, 242.

⁵⁸ CD II/1, 319.

⁵⁹ Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, 238.

single truth.”⁶⁰ All of history and creation is encompassed by this circle, and so whatever truth can be found in history and creation can be said to be *in* Christ. It is thus *distinct* from Jesus Christ while not being outside or alongside of Him.

In a key paragraph Metzger elucidates Barth’s position:

The Word who is present to all points in time, the mediator who mediates all things to God in his person, raises up witnesses to himself in his role as prophet, not only in Scripture and the church, but also in broader culture. There is one who reconciles all things to God. And although there is one great prophet, namely, he who also reconciles, the possibility exists that this Word will raise up other *words* from the world reconciled to God to bear witness to his life, and this by means of indwelling them. Such words of witness need not be sacred words because the Word of life has reconciled *all* things to God, being present to the whole of history. His dominion knows no bounds. The Word of God as Jesus Christ is the centre of creaturely reality as the truth. But he is also present to the circumference of creaturely reality throughout history as the one who indwells words of witness whereby they manifest truth. Christ is present to the whole of creation and human culture, serving as both the centre and as the one who is able to indwell words on the periphery, causing them to bear witness to himself.⁶¹

There is hope then for witness from God-fearers among the Gentile nations, such as Naaman, the wise men, and the Queen of Sheba, and hope still that all others will someday bear witness with their words and lives to the light of life.⁶² The basis for this hope is Christ as “the light of the world. And therefore to be man is always to stand already, even if with closed or blind eyes, in this light, the light of life.”⁶³

⁶⁰ Ibid, 261. Hunsinger makes use of Tillich’s categories of autonomy, heteronomy and theonomy in his exposition of the secular parables (see Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, 261-3.). Other lights do not exist “alongside” the Light, thus, “simple autonomy” is excluded (ibid., 262). Nor do they exist “outside” the Light, therefore “simple heteronomy” is also excluded (ibid., 262-3). Other lights only exist as lights by dwelling within the Light (theonomy) (ibid., 262-3). Thus centre and periphery, whole and part, entail one another mutually (ibid., 261).

⁶¹ Metzger, *The Word of Christ and the World of Culture*, 134.

⁶² See Barth’s discussion of such figures in CD IV/3, 488.

⁶³ CD IV/3, 487. In CD IV/3, Barth speaks of the Word enfolding the sphere of the prophets and apostles (CD IV/3, 116) and dwelling within true words, the words of witness (ibid., 111). Here in CD IV/3, one finds that all humanity stands in the light of Christ. For Barth, words bear witness when Christ indwells them. But even outside the event of witness, Christ is present to humanity and human words in that humanity and its words dwell within him. Indications of the words of witness at the periphery dwelling in Christ himself can be found in CD IV/3, 122-3.

Christ is the light of all life. In the reconciliation accomplished in the history of Jesus Christ, God has altered the general human situation. There is a difference between the Christian community and the world at large, between the particular situation in which Christians stand in relation to God, and the general one between God and the world.⁶⁴ But the basis for both the particular and general situations is the same, namely, the reconciliation of the world accomplished in Christ Jesus.⁶⁵ So, Barth says, “there are no clear boundaries between them”.⁶⁶ Jesus Christ is the light of life in whom all stand, knowingly or unknowingly, “called” or “to be called”.⁶⁷ The basis for the hope of “biblical universalism”, over against that counterfeit universalism, or the “historical relativism”⁶⁸ of Nathan the Wise, is found in “the human situation as universally altered and redetermined by the act and Word of God, by the existence and work of Christ”,⁶⁹ whose light shines even in the dark regions beyond the Christian sphere of witness to his light. Therefore: “religions of heathendom” may “come about because man simply does not know or refuses to know the ground of divine immanence in Jesus Christ”, but this does not mean that those religions cannot speak true words, which are “in” Jesus Christ.⁷⁰

But how does Barth propose that secular words be evaluated to determine if they are true words of God, real parables of God's kingdom?

Secular words which are distinct from that of Jesus Christ are “true” insofar as they stand “in the closest material and substantial conformity and agreement with the one Word of God”.⁷¹ Parables of the kingdom can share in the content and truth of God's Word in Christ “only to the extent that they declare nothing of their own, but in their utterance and emphasis are prepared to attest this one Word exactly as it is, without subtraction, addition or alteration”.⁷² Yet how can human words “ever succeed in attesting and corresponding to the one Word of God, or even try to do so?”⁷³ “Obviously”, Barth replies, “this is something to which they can only attain.”⁷⁴ The

⁶⁴ Ibid., 489-90.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 487.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 490.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 488.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 490.

⁷⁰ CD II/1, 319.

⁷¹ CD IV/3, 111

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

truth of secular parables of the kingdom depends on whether or not they point to Jesus Christ. As they point to Christ, they do not embody Christ's truth fully, but rather "express the one and total truth from a particular angle, and to that extent only implicitly and not explicitly in its unity and totality".⁷⁵ When the consummation of God's reign in Christ occurs, all words will fully reflect the light of Christ, but until then:

there can be no question of anything more than signs of His lordship or attestations of His prophecy, whether in Scripture, in the confession and message of the community, or in such true words as pierce the secularism of the worldly life surrounding it in closer or more distant proximity.⁷⁶

While all human words can only attain to the truth of God's Word, one can still delineate several guidelines for evaluating whether or not a secular word is a parable of the kingdom. Foremost is the question of the "agreement [of these secular words] with the witness of Scripture".⁷⁷ No direct prefiguration is expected, but rather harmonization; true secular parables must not bring anything different from or contradictory to Scripture.⁷⁸ A true secular word "will not lead its hearers away from Scripture, but more deeply into it".⁷⁹ It will "materially say what [Scripture] says, although from a different source and in another tongue".⁸⁰ This does not mean that secular words must consist only in a straightforward repetition of Scripture in order to be true. As Hunsinger explains: "the issue is simply one of compatibility or logical consistency. Secular words are not expected flatly to repeat what is already known of the content of scripture, but rather to cast light on scripture by being compatible with it."⁸¹ William A. Christian has described this test as "an extended principle of consistency": if Christians are to suppose that non-Christian words are really true, then what is said in them must not be inconsistent with Christian doctrine.⁸² What must be opposed is, in John Howard Yoder's words, "the uncritical

⁷⁵ Ibid., 123.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 122.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 126.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 125.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 126.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 115.

⁸¹ Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, 267.

⁸² William A. Christian, *Doctrines of Religious Communities: A Philosophical Study* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), 215.

importation of value-laden substance that is anti-Biblical or pagan, i.e., not only in origin or language different from but in content counter to the understanding of God, of human community and morality, or of nature inherited by the apostolic church from its Hebrew antecedents".⁸³

A second criterion for evaluating the truth of secular words involves their compatibility with the dogmas and confessions of the Church. While secular parables should in general harmonize with these dogmas and confessions, in this sphere some newness is permissible. Secular parables can extend and fill in existing Church dogmas, and might even provoke dogmatic revision.⁸⁴ Dogmas are a step removed from Scripture, and are thus more amenable to change. One must also ask, Barth suggests, what fruits these secular words bear in the world at large: if they have a generally salutary effect, the chances are greater that they might be parables of the kingdom than if they have generally negative consequences. Barth would also test the effect that secular words have on the Church. For them to be parables of the kingdom, they must offer both comfort and correction for the Church.⁸⁵ The Church, in other words, will not only be both challenged by secular parables to repent for past sins and to live up to its calling but will also be confirmed in that calling, i.e., in its submission to its Lord, Jesus Christ.

What use are Christians to make of secular parables?

First, Barth claims, they should serve to remind the Church of its failure in its mission. Their existence should prompt the Church to ask itself why it "has lagged behind when it ought to have been in the van? Why has it not told itself what it must now learn from the children of this world?"⁸⁶ Barth thus contends that the reception of secular parables should not alter the Church's fundamental mission, the proclamation of what God has done in Jesus Christ, but instead make it more faithful to that duty.

⁸³ John Howard Yoder, "The Disavowal of Constantine: An Alternative Perspective on Interfaith Dialogue", in *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical*, ed. Michael G. Cartwright (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 249.

⁸⁴ *CD* IV/3, 127.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 129.

As useful as secular parables may be for the Church as corrective and comfort, they cannot become norms for the Church, unlike the Bible, for “they lack the unity and compactness and therefore the constancy and universality of His self-revelation as it takes place and is to be sought in Holy Scripture”.⁸⁷ In the first volume of the *Church Dogmatics* Barth noted that although true words appear in the secular sphere, Christians are not thereby obligated or authorized to canonize such free words of grace:

God may speak to us through a pagan or an atheist, and thus give us to understand that the boundary between the Church and the secular world can still take at any time a different course from that which we think we discern. Yet this does not mean, unless we are prophets, that we ourselves have to proclaim the pagan or atheistic thing which we have heard.⁸⁸

The Church’s use of these secular parables will always be provisional and on an *ad hoc* basis. The free words from outside of the Church’s orbit are always context-specific, coming to the Church in a specific time and situation. Furthermore, their reception by the Church is never, in practice, an affair of the whole community. Because, Barth argues, “the right use of . . . free communications of the Lord can never be regarded as other than extraordinary”, secular parables “cannot be fixed and canonized as the Word of the Lord”.⁸⁹ To canonize secular parables would mark a failure to exercise the cautious scepticism proper to the reception of such extraordinary words. Those in the Church who hear true words from outside should not insist that they become new dogmas for the Church catholic, but should instead “show themselves to be such as have heard a true word and been radically smitten by it. They should bring forth the appropriate fruits.”⁹⁰ Barth concludes his treatment of secular parables by cautioning that one should not claim too much for secular parables, for “all such phenomena are doubtful and contestable”; conversely, he also warns that one should not claim too little for the prophecy of the Lord Jesus Christ and its “almighty power to bring forth such true words even *extra muros ecclesiae* and to attest itself through them”.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Ibid., 131.

⁸⁸ CD I/1, 55.

⁸⁹ CD IV/3, 133.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 134.

⁹¹ Ibid., 135.

A Recourse to Natural Theology?

The most striking example of the claims that, in CD §69.2, Barth has returned to the natural theology he had once rejected are associated with Hans Küng. Küng claims that Barth's account of extra-ecclesial truth constitutes a "new evaluation of the knowledge of God from the world of creation and from 'natural theology' . . . a new evaluation of the world religions".⁹² He contends that Barth concedes "that in the final analysis there are in fact, 'other lights' alongside the one light of Christ ('tail lights', as it were, of the one light), that there are 'other true words' alongside the one Word".⁹³ He suggests that Barth's "so cogently constructed dogmatic world had been, at least in principle, exploded (though most of the Barthians had failed to notice this)" and that the "revelational positivism" that "Dietrich Bonhoeffer had once criticised from his Nazi prison cell . . . had had the bottom knocked out of it".⁹⁴

James Barr's 1991 Gifford Lectures, *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology*, also attempt to set the acknowledgment of extra-ecclesial words against a detailed reading of Barth's early polemic against natural theology.⁹⁵ Barr welcomes Barth's idea of the extra-ecclesial words as "perhaps . . . something" with respect to the "recognition of natural theology".⁹⁶ What constitutes this "something" for Barr is the claim by Barth that there are other words alongside the one Word.

For Barr natural theology deals with a knowledge of God that is inherent in human beings and whose function is preparatory for "the special revelation of God made through Jesus Christ, through the Church, through the Bible".⁹⁷ By virtue of this "natural" knowledge of God:

people can understand Christ and his message, can feel themselves sinful and in need of salvation, because they already have this appreciation, dim as it may be, of God and of morality. The "natural knowledge" of God, however dim, is an awareness of the true God,

⁹² Hans Küng, *Theology for the Third Millennium: An Ecumenical View*, trans. Peter Heinegg (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 279.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 280

⁹⁵ James Barr, *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology: The Gifford lectures for 1991 Delivered in the University of Edinburgh* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

⁹⁶ Ibid., 188.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 1.

and provides a point of contact without which special revelation would never be able to penetrate.⁹⁸

Barr recognises that such natural theology as he describes was originally denied any legitimacy by Barth.⁹⁹ Barr describes this denial in terms of Barth's rejection of any preparatory knowledge of God:

The revelation of God did not fit into a point of contact with what was already there: it made its own new contact, quite independently of any previously existing contact point.¹⁰⁰

Barth's rejection was linked to a refusal to acknowledge a source of knowledge "previous to, or separate from, or supplementary to, the revelation of God in Christ".¹⁰¹

What is problematic in Barr's assessment of Barth's position on natural theology is Barr's attempt to equate the recognition of "other words alongside the one Word" with a possible recognition by Barth of a natural theology which might presuppose the *independence* of these "other" words *vis à vis* the one Word.¹⁰²

The discussion in CD §69.2 of the relationship between the words and the Word indicates that Barth does not allow for any word that is independent of the Word. Barth's rejection of any independent source of revelation reflects, in turn, his consistent adherence to a particular theological position which, it turns out, is a foundation both of the rejection of natural theology and of the affirmation of extra-ecclesial truth.

Barth alludes to this issue in his famous essay, "No": "If there really is such a sphere of preparation, will this leave the understanding of revelation proper

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 6-9.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 6.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² This is also the problem in Küng's understanding, which in turn influences Lindsay's assessment of the relationship of "these 'little lights' *alongside* [italics mine] the great light of Jesus Christ" (See Lindsay, *Barth, Israel and Jesus: Karl Barth's Theology of Israel*, 99; see also Hans Küng, *Islam: Past Present and Future*, trans. John Bowden (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2007), 680 n.45).

unaffected?”¹⁰³ In Barth’s Gifford lectures natural theology is linked to the modern, autonomous, Cartesian human¹⁰⁴ who claims to occupy “an independent and secure position over and against God”.¹⁰⁵ For Barth such a human and the God whom he/she presupposes are abstractions in equal measure.¹⁰⁶

This link between natural theology and the human desire for autonomy is given an even higher profile in Barth’s most considered account of natural theology, found in *CD* §26, “The Knowability of God.”¹⁰⁷ Indeed, it is precisely this link that Barth cites as the key reason for the persistence of natural theology within the history of the Church. Barth claims that even the Christian persists in abstracting his/her own existence from that of Jesus Christ, thus taking up a position over and against Him. This strikes at the very heart of the gospel. Faith “would have to be annulled and the Church . . . would have to be shattered, if even for a single moment man could and should again exist as such independently”.¹⁰⁸

It is not, however, as if such independence is prohibited only within the Church. Barth insists that the Church has no right to address non-believers as if they existed independently of God. It is not true that any unbeliever “stands and upholds himself”.¹⁰⁹ On the contrary, Barth says, “the truth of his existence is simply this – that Jesus Christ has died and risen again for him. It is this and this alone which is to be proclaimed to him as his truth.”¹¹⁰

The basic objection to natural theology for Barth is that God is incomprehensible apart from God’s dealings with humanity, and cannot be found apart from those dealings. It is this same basic understanding, used in the 1930’s against natural theology, that is now used as one of the foundations of Barth’s

¹⁰³ Karl Barth, “No”, in Emil Brunner and Karl Barth, *Natural Theology*, trans. Peter Fraenkel (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1946), 85.

¹⁰⁴ Karl Barth, *The Knowledge of God and the Service of God According to the Teaching of the Reformation*, trans. J.L.M. Haire and Ian Henderson (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1938), 16-7.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 103.

¹⁰⁶ See *Ibid.*, 13-24 and 35-44.

¹⁰⁷ *CD* II/1, 63-178.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 166.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 167.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

account of extra-ecclesial words. The very possibility of extra-ecclesial words is grounded, in part, in Barth's claim that:

while man may deny God, according to the Word of Reconciliation God does not deny man. Man may be hostile to the Gospel of God, but this Gospel is not hostile to him. The fact that he is closed to it does not alter the further fact that it is open for him. Nor does the fact that he does not recognise the sovereignty of Jesus Christ, and if he did would perhaps rebel against it in his autonomy, result in its losing any of its validity even in relation to him.¹¹¹

Such words emerge, therefore, as a particular instance of God's covenantal union with men and women. As Hunsinger comments:

. . . the possibility of *secular* parables *was* explained without recourse to positing any innate human capacities and therefore *without recourse to* natural theology. Secular parables, like any true human words (including those of the Bible and the church) find the condition for their possibility strictly in the miracle of grace. They are free actualizations of a possibility which belongs to (and remains with) Jesus Christ alone. "If there are true words of God, it is all miraculous" (p. 118[CD IV/3]).¹¹²

Barth wishes to affirm two things. First, the Word of Christ is the truth; and second, He is the basis for all true words about God and humanity.¹¹³ Barth writes that the truth as Jesus Christ "is the truth, in which all truths, the truth of God particularly and the truth of man, are enclosed, not as truths in themselves, but as rays or facets of its truth."¹¹⁴ Metzger contends, however, that the question may still persist in the mind of the reader though as to the "cogency of Barth's claim that there exist non-particular words of witness to the particular Word".¹¹⁵ Metzger refers to T. F. Torrance's comment on Barth's discussion of Jesus Christ as ascended in *Church Dogmatics* IV/3, writing: "Christ seemed to be swallowed up in the transcendent Light and Spirit of God, so that the humanity of the risen Jesus appeared to be

¹¹¹ CD IV/3, 119.

¹¹² Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, 271.

¹¹³ CD IV/3, 122.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹¹⁵ Metzger, *The Word of Christ and the World of Culture*, 136.

displaced by what [Barth] called ‘the humanity of God’ in its turning toward us”.¹¹⁶ Metzger comments that “in spite of Barth’s concern to champion particularity over against abstraction as witnessed in his rejection of the *logos asarkos*, and in spite of his own denials, his discussion of secular witness may suggest to many”¹¹⁷ that Barth is *himself* guilty of promoting the very thing he seems to oppose – “abstract impartations”.¹¹⁸

Barth argues that the “abstraction” of non-particular words is “only apparent” since they point beyond themselves to the one Word of God, the “centre and totality, and therefore to Jesus Christ”.¹¹⁹ “They do not express partial truths” for the one Word of God, Jesus Christ, “declares Himself in them”.¹²⁰ Thus, through his indwelling presence, “they express the one and total truth from a particular angle”.¹²¹ They may bear witness to the Word from the angle or standpoint of pointing to “the goodness of the original creation”, or the “jeopardising” of the creation, “its liberation”, or its future glory.¹²² Even so, even from such “particular” angles, they are witnesses of the one truth because they bear witness to the one kingdom of God revealed in his Word.¹²³ Their witness is implicit, not explicit.¹²⁴ These words of true witness “indirectly point” to Him, the Word, who “indirectly declares” Himself in them.¹²⁵ Nonetheless, their witness faithfully reflects “the one light of the one

¹¹⁶ Ibid. See also T. F. Torrance, *Karl Barth, Biblical and Evangelical Theologian* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), 134.

¹¹⁷ Metzger, *The Word of Christ and the World of Culture*, 137.

¹¹⁸ CD IV/3, 117. Barth criticizes Emil Brunner for thinking “of the second Person of the Trinity as only *Logos*” (Barth, *Table Talk*, 49). Barth believes Brunner’s regard for the “*Logos asarkos*” is the reason for the latter’s natural theology – which is a mistake. At the hands of Brunner, “the *Logos* becomes an abstract principle” (ibid). By contrast, the *Logos* for Barth is always concrete and particular, *logos ensarkos*, and witnesses to the *Logos* are always the result of particular events under divine command.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 123.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid. On an interesting point, Metzger contends that concerning witness to the Word from the standpoint of the “jeopardising” of the creation, one finds a potential parallel in the Hindu philosopher, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (See Metzger, *The Word of Christ and the World of Culture*, 137). Radhakrishnan states that, “[t]he everlasting vagrancy of thought, the contemporary muddle of conflicting philosophies, the rival ideologies which cut through national frontiers and geographical divisions, are a sign of spiritual homelessness. The unrest is in a sense sacred, for it is the confession of the failure of a self-sufficient humanism with no outlook beyond the world” (Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, “The Hindu View of Life”, in *The Ways of Religion: An Introduction to the Major Traditions*, third edn., ed. Roger Eastman (New York: Oxford University Press), 21-2).

¹²³ CD IV/3, 123.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

truth” as a “particular refraction”.¹²⁶ These words are words of witness, true words bearing witness to the Word who is the truth, their truthfulness being conditioned, “presupposed and implied” in view of their “connexion with the totality of Jesus Christ and his prophecy”.¹²⁷

Metzger explicates Barth’s position thus:

It is because the Word *as* Jesus Christ indwells these words that they bear witness. Moreover, one only comes to know that such words bear witness to the Word by proceeding from the Word himself to these words (or from the Word as he manifests himself in the more direct forms of witness in Scripture and the church), rather than from these words to the Word. In view of the Word who causes them to bear witness, and through whom one knows *that* they bear witness, however indirectly, one knows they bear witness, not abstractly, but concretely from the standpoint of their “particular orientation”. *How* though does one actually discern which words in the secular community bear witness to the Word of Christ? How will one know which words in the secular sphere bear witness to the particular Word when such words do not explicitly reflect that particularity? For Barth, these words demonstrate their truthfulness by calling the church to the Word of Christ. Such witnesses are attested by Scripture and “will not lead us away from, but more deeply into, the *communio sanctorum* of all ages which is attested in these documents”.¹²⁸

The importance of Barth’s concept of “secular words” for inter-religious encounter

Metzger is correct when he says that:

It appears safe to assume that implicit in Barth’s statements . . . is the idea that witnesses may . . . emerge from within the context of the non-Christian religions. Here then “secular word” is taken to refer to the *whole* domain, which stands outside the parameters of the Bible and the church.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Metzger, *The Word of Christ and the World of Culture*, 138. Here Metzger is quoting from *CD* IV/3, 123, 126-7.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 127.

Metzger's position is validated by Thompson. Thompson, in his unpublished PhD thesis, recounts a conversation he had with Küng in 1992. During this conversation Küng stated that Barth had confided to him "that although he [Barth] had not explicitly referred to them, he did have the other religions in mind when he was writing the account of extra-ecclesial truth".¹³⁰

Barth's concept of secular parables of the kingdom therefore provides theological justification for a way of conceiving how the words (and actions) of non-Christian religions might be affirmed as "signs" or "parables" of the one Word of God, Jesus Christ.

Hunsinger points to the sovereign freedom of the Word as the way in which it can and does declare itself in the secular sphere:

Insofar as the one Word of God declares itself in this way, in the form of secular parables, it becomes clear that, despite all ambiguity, the real contextual whole in which these words participate is only apparently secular; in reality it is actually *christocentric*.¹³¹

Thus, like Christian words, secular (or non-Christian) words must be "taken up" into Jesus Christ for them to be true. However, unlike Christian words they are "unwitting witnesses" to Jesus Christ: only in Christianity does the speaking of true words have an epistemological dimension. Not only is Christian proclamation true due to its being taken up into Jesus Christ, but the proclaimers are granted knowledge of that which they proclaim, i.e., they are granted the knowledge of the name of Jesus Christ.

Because the Church's reception of parables of the kingdom should always be "*ad hoc* and ephemeral",¹³² one cannot claim on their basis anything positive for non-

¹³⁰ Geoffrey Thompson, "'As open to the world as any theologian could be . . .': Karl Barth's Account of Extra-Ecclesial Truth and Its Value to Christianity's Encounter with Other Religious Traditions", PhD thesis, University of Cambridge (1995), 3.

¹³¹ Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, 265.

¹³² Metzger, *The Word of Christ and the World of Culture*, 127. Thompson points out that in *Types of Christian Theology* Hans W. Frei describes Barth's method of *ad hoc* correlation (see Hans W. Frei, *Types of Christian Theology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), see also Thompson, "'As open to the world as any theologian could be . . .': Karl Barth's Account of Extra-Ecclesial Truth and Its Value to Christianity's Encounter with Other Religious Traditions", 38-9). Frei begins his account

Christian religions or philosophies *taken as a whole*. “We may listen quietly to others,” Barth counsels:

We may hear what is said by the whole history of religion, poetry, mythology and philosophy. We shall certainly meet there with many things which might be claimed as elements of the Word spoken by Jesus Christ. But what a mass of rudiments and fragments which in their isolation and absoluteness say something very different from this Word!¹³³

Although one can affirm the presence of true words of God in non-Christian and secular words, one may not infer from these signs of God’s free, overpowering grace that non-Christian and secular words are all therefore equally valid paths to truth and

of Barth’s strategy by alluding to the definition of theology in the opening pages of the *Church Dogmatics*. There, Thompson states, “Barth declares that theology is a self-critical task performed within the Church which presupposes both the presence of Christ in the Church and the fact of Christian confession. It is this confession which theology subjects to scrutiny by the measure of Christ” (Thompson, “‘As open to the world as any theologian could be . . .’: Karl Barth’s Account of Extra-Ecclesial Truth and Its Value to Christianity’s Encounter with Other Religious Traditions”, 38). As such, theology “follows the talk of the Church to the extent that in its question as to the correctness of its utterance it does not measure it by an alien standard but by its own source and object” (CD I/1, 4). Here is the foundation of theology as internal self-description. Frei speaks of this self-descriptive task as *re-description*: theology is the community of faith seeking to re-describe its first-level assertions: “It is an exploration not usually of their truth, but of their meaning; it is their *re-description* in technical concepts rather than their *explanation*” (Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 81). Yet, says Frei, the question that then emerges “is whether theology in this sense subordinates or eliminates all relation” to other enterprises (ibid., 39). Frei’s answer is clear: Barth’s theology is characterised not by elimination of such relations but by the subordination of such other enterprises to theology. In a passage that gives credence to Frei’s analysis, Barth says: “A free theologian does not deny, nor is he [sic] ashamed of, his indebtedness to a particular philosophy or ontology, to ways of thought and speech. These may be traditional or a bit original, old or new, coherent or incoherent. No one speaks exclusively in Biblical terms. . . . [The theologian] is a philosopher ‘as though he were not’ and he has his ontology ‘as though he had it not’ His ontology will be subject to criticism and control by his theology and not conversely” (Karl Barth, “The Gift of Freedom”, in *The Humanity of God*, trans. John Newton Thomas (London: Collins, 1961), 92-3). In Frei’s analysis, what emerges from this particular form of interaction between theology’s “first-level assertions” and the “technical concepts” of other disciplines is a total of three different levels of discourse: “Barth . . . finds the heart of theological discourse in the constant transition between first-order Christian statements, especially biblical confession and exegesis, and their second-order redescription, in which description as internal dogmatic description makes use of third order free, unsystematic, and constant reference to conceptual patterns of a non-Christian, non-theological kind – including phenomenology, conceptual analysis, Hegelian philosophy, analyses of contemporary culture, and so on” (Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 43). The usefulness of Frei’s analysis to this thesis is in his distinction of the different levels of discourse. As Thompson states: “In an instance of *ad hoc* correlation, the text . . . is a second-order redescription of first-order, theological convictions making use of third-order, non-theological concepts” (see Thompson, “‘As open to the world as any theologian could be . . .’: Karl Barth’s Account of Extra-Ecclesial Truth and Its Value to Christianity’s Encounter with Other Religious Traditions”, 39).

¹³³ CD IV/3, 108.

salvation. Not, however, because Christianity as a human religion is the one true path to salvation, but because all truth and salvation is contained within and comes through the one Word of God, Jesus Christ.

What type of encounter between Christian and non-Christian (Jew or Muslim) could find warrant from Barth's framework?

Bruce Marshall is correct when he states:

Dialogue with the adherents of other views of the world can give the Christian community compelling reasons to change its own established beliefs, without requiring it to surrender its identity by epistemically decentralizing the gospel narratives. . . . The community cannot reasonably accept truth claims which are simply incoherent with its own most central beliefs, but it may expect that significant claims and good reasons for accepting them can come, in principle, from virtually any quarter.¹³⁴

Marshall continues:

Whether and to what extent Christians share non-trivial beliefs with adherents of other worldviews, or encounter in other worldviews compelling reasons to change their established beliefs, is a strictly empirical matter. This is not at all to say that the Christian community should not expect to share, or come to share, significant commitments with other communities (in some of which its own members will, of course, also participate). But to try to stipulate what this shared content or these convincing reasons should be in advance of actual dialogue between communities and worldviews is to fall prey to a generalizing strategy which . . . invites distortion of normative meaning on both sides of the dialogue. This is especially pertinent in regard to Christian dialogue with other religious communities, whose webs of belief are as comprehensive as its own and with which it shares no members (as it regularly does, for example, with political communities). The degree to which the Christian community will find in the claims of other communities compelling reasons to change its own beliefs cannot be decided *a priori*, but can only be discovered on a case by case basis, by actual dialogue with those communities. This dialogue has the best chance of success – of identifying without distortion of either community's outlook the actual points of shared belief, of deep-seated difference, and of reasons which might lead to

¹³⁴ Bruce D. Marshall, "Truth Claims and the Possibility of Jewish-Christian Dialogue", *Modern Theology*, 8 (1992), 235.

change – when it is rooted in a quasi-ethnographic attempt to understand the other community on its own terms. .¹³⁵

Marshall further contends that: “[a]s the Christian community undertakes dialogue with other religious communities in this *case by case fashion* it may discover that there are some with which it shares more than others, and which offer it more numerous and more compelling reasons to change its own established beliefs.”¹³⁶ Marshall’s “case by case fashion” corresponds to Barth’s “*ad hoc* and ephemeral” situations.

It is precisely in this respect that Marshall believes the relation of Christianity to Judaism is unique.¹³⁷ The Church shares with Israel a *canonical text*. There is no other community with which the Church has this particular relationship, and indeed this allegiance of two different communities to the same normative text is without parallel among world religious traditions. By sharing a canonical text with Judaism, Christians “should expect that dialogue with Jews will not only disclose a range of common beliefs and commitments already in place, but will consistently give Christians reasons to change their own beliefs”.¹³⁸

It is Marshall’s belief that Christians can learn from Jews how to read their own scriptures. They can learn how to interpret the text they share with Jews in ways which are more deeply formed by the details which cumulatively give the text its shape, and so be given “reasons of the most forceful kind for modifying their own belief and practice”.¹³⁹

Marshall’s understanding of the unique relationship between Christianity and Judaism corresponds to Barth’s view of who constitutes the community of those who are elected in Christ. But it must be recognised that Barth’s view of Israel is not shared by contemporary rabbinic Judaism as a whole. For instance, Michael Wyschogrod contends that Judaism might regard Christ’s reconciliation as something

¹³⁵ Ibid., 236.

¹³⁶ Ibid., emphasis added.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 237.

which Israel's God simply has not done: "Jewish faith does not testify to it".¹⁴⁰ The incarnation is a story which Judaism "does not hear".¹⁴¹ More radically, Michael Goldberg argues that the incarnation is an act which is incompatible with the identity of the God attested in the Tanakh.¹⁴²

Despite these positions within rabbinic Judaism, it is acceptable to believe, in concert with Marshall, that "the fact that Jews and Christians share a canonical text, one which shapes and corrects the particular nexus of belief and practice which constitutes each community, is the chief condition for . . . a dialogue in which Christians can learn from Jews about how to be Christians".¹⁴³ In tandem with the conclusion to Chapter 2, this position should also be extended to include Islam – Christians can and should learn from Muslims about how to be Christians.

Conclusion

From Barth's framework, words from other religions can and should be tested against Scripture and Church dogmas in order to "include" those words from other religions which are true within the light of Christ.¹⁴⁴ Through the dialogical process, Christians can come to discern, exegetically and *a posteriori*, whether or not these words are parables of God's kingdom.

¹⁴⁰ Michael Wyschogrod, "Why was and is the theology of Karl Barth of interest to a Jewish theologian?", in *Footnotes to a theology: the Karl Barth Colloquium of 1972*, ed. Martin H. Rumscheidt (The Corporation for the Publication of Academic Studies in Religion in Canada, 1974), 100.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² See Michael Goldberg, "God, Action, and Narrative: Which Narrative? Which Action? Which God?", *The Journal of Religion*, 68.1 (1988), 39-56.

¹⁴³ Marshall, "Truth Claims and the Possibility of Jewish-Christian Dialogue", 238. Sonderegger echoes Marshall's position. She writes: "Barth, I think has real concrete Jews in mind – not the delicate 'ancient Hebrews' of much Protestant imagination – and these Jews have an authentic history. . . . The events of post-biblical history – the destruction of the Second Temple, the rise of rabbinic Judaism, the medieval ghetto life, the Jewish life in dispersion – they all gain significance in Barth's work because they are 'facts', they happened in our world. . . . The Jews are historically serious because . . . [t]hey are 'mediators' between Jesus of Nazareth and those who believe in him. They 'reflect' Jesus, because they, like him, are Jews; they 'reflect' humanity, because they, like all flesh, are sinful." See Sonderegger, *That Jesus Christ was born a Jew: Karl Barth's "Doctrine of Israel"*, 69.

¹⁴⁴ Hunsinger contends that Barth's position is *inclusivist* in the sense that it holds that truth is where one finds it. True words may be found outside the Church which need to be heard within the Church. Such words might pertain to any aspect of the Church's belief or practice. His position is *uncompromising* in the sense that subjectivism, pluralism and relativism (three compromises associated with inclusivity) are all ruled out (see Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, 279).

The discovery of parables of the kingdom will always occur in an *ad hoc* fashion. But, Alain Epp Weaver writes, “since they have only provisional status, the theologian should not attempt to order them into a static system or develop a fixed method by which to discern them. . . . Scripture, in other words, will test words from other religions to determine if they are parables of the kingdom or not.”¹⁴⁵ But, as Johnson contends, Scripture is not “the Word of God *per se*”, it “is a sign that seeks to bear witness to who God is.”¹⁴⁶ Weaver writes further: “since scripture does not consist of a method or a set of rules, but comprises rather multiple narratives of human proclamations about God’s free grace towards humanity, the results which this ‘test’ of scripture will produce can never be known in advance of the Christian community’s prayerful consideration of the significance of non-Christian words in the light of the biblical text.”¹⁴⁷

Not only would such an inter-religious encounter with the other Abrahamic faiths serve the purpose of giving Christians a deeper understanding of scripture; it could also function as a critique of Christian dogma and practice.¹⁴⁸ Revisions made because of the reception of these parables must, of course, be compatible with scripture – “what is seen and heard”¹⁴⁹ must be tested by this norm. As Hunsinger explains: “It will be necessary for the community to learn new things for the future which go beyond the past and which could not have been taught when the dogmas and confessions were formulated.”¹⁵⁰ Nonetheless, these new things “will somehow be an extension of the line visible in the dogmas and confessions”.¹⁵¹ Therefore, in the midst of innovation, continuity with the past will not be broken, but will be taken up and continued “with new responsibility on the basis of better instruction”.¹⁵²

This approach thrusts Barth’s ideas into the current theological debate about Christian encounter with the other Abrahamic religions, in particular Islam. It

¹⁴⁵ Alain Epp Weaver, “Parables of the Kingdom and Religious Plurality: with Barth and Yoder toward a Nonresistant Public Theology”, *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 73.3 (July, 1998), 437.

¹⁴⁶ Johnson, *The Mystery of God: Karl Barth and the Postmodern Foundations of Theology*, 32, 185.

¹⁴⁷ Weaver, “Parables of the Kingdom and Religious Plurality: with Barth and Yoder toward a Nonresistant Public Theology”, 437-8.

¹⁴⁸ Barth allowed for secular parables to revise existing Church dogma (cf. *CD IV/3*, 127).

¹⁴⁹ *CD IV/3*, 125.

¹⁵⁰ Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, 268.

¹⁵¹ *CD IV/3*, 127.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

provides potential for Christian preconceptions concerning the content of Scripture to be challenged, thus bringing about new, fresh interpretations that are consistent with the Word of God, whilst also allowing for the possibility of discerning God's presence in the other Abrahamic faiths. It also provides an equally strong commitment to acknowledging the genuine diversity of those other religions whilst also acknowledging what those religions (in particular Islam) can teach Christians about Christianity.

CHAPTER 4

Truth *extra muros ecclesiae* II – the “little lights of creation” as analogous to the just state: providing the Church with an arena for inter-religious encounter

Introduction

Most discussions concerning Karl Barth and truth *extra muros ecclesiae* focus on that part of §69.2 known as “The Word and the words”.¹ Thompson is correct to believe that for the purposes of inter-religious encounter, any discussion concerning Karl Barth and truth *extra muros ecclesiae* should be extended to include what is commonly termed “Creation and its ‘lights’ ”.² Here one finds a second and less commonly noticed sense of Barth’s understanding of truth *extra muros ecclesiae*, one which points to aspects of the created order and human creativity that relate *indirectly* to Jesus Christ.

While Barth never gave an example of a secular parable of the Kingdom of God, this chapter will argue that the text known as “Creation and its ‘lights’ ” stands in continuity with Barth’s understanding of the just state. His essay “The Christian Community and the Civil Community” almost exactly parallels his argument for the lights of creation in *CD* §69.2 and is Barth’s most concrete expression of the just state.

The just state is a state which strives for justice, peace and the common good for all of its citizens, Christians and non-Christians alike. Christians submit to the authority of the state as this is the ordered context within which the “collective life” of humanity can be maintained, and the Gospel preached. The service of the Church to the state is therefore directed towards the establishment of a just political order. The Church must always hope for a just state which is interested primarily in human beings and not in abstract causes, which is constituted by a commonly acknowledged

¹ See, for example Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology*; Metzger, *The Word of Christ and the World of Culture: Sacred and Secular through the Theology of Karl Barth* and David Lochhead, *The Dialogical Imperative: A Christian Reflection on Interfaith Encounter* (London: SCM, 1988).

² This view is also held by Michael Welker who believes that this section is crucial to any discussion of inter-religious encounter. He expressed this opinion to the author in a conversation in Heidelberg on 29th July 2006. (The titles “The Word and words” and “Creation and its ‘lights’ ” are borrowed from Thompson’s article “Religious Diversity, Christian Doctrine and Karl Barth”, 3-24).

law which protects all citizens and from which no citizens are exempt. The Church must always hope for a just state which recognises that it must also have special responsibility for those citizens who are socially and economically weak and threatened, and which guarantees its citizens an equality of responsible freedom, i.e., freedom properly balanced by duties to the common good. In striving for such justice, Barth believes that members of the Church can make similar political decisions to “non-Christians” because of their mutual dependency upon God. This mutual dependency parallels the mutual dependency of the Abrahamic faiths argued for in Chapter 2. This chapter therefore interprets Barth’s term “non-Christians” to include those from the other Abrahamic faiths.

Within Barth’s understanding of democratic society, the potential exists for inter-religious encounter to have concrete expression. His work provides a model for pluralist European society where the Christian community can make common cause with those from the other Abrahamic religions, specifically Islam, in striving for justice and the common good of all citizens.

Creation and its lights

Though Barth explains how secular words of truth demonstrate their truthfulness, he does not give examples of such secular witness. His reasoning for this is that he does not wish to “make pronouncements on matters on which” Jesus Christ “has already spoken or will perhaps do”.³ He simply wishes to point out that Christ is able to “bring forth such true words” of witness “even *extra muros ecclesiae*”.⁴

Having said this, though, Metzger contends that “Barth points to Mozart as one such parable of witness”:⁵

In its own particular way, the music of Mozart may, in the light of the Word, bear witness to him in all his particularity and glory as through

³ CD IV/3, 135.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Metzger, *The Word of Christ and the World of Culture*, 139

a parabolic veil, calling the church “more deeply into . . . the *communio sanctorum*” of the ages.⁶

In principle Barth would also be open to receiving such parables from other areas of life which might include “political, social, intellectual, academic, artistic, literary, moral or religious life”.⁷ As Chapter 3 has shown, the potential exists within Barth’s framework to be able to receive a word from other religions. So it is reasonable to believe, for the purposes of encouraging inter-religious encounter and the subsequent quest to discover an arena for that encounter (where possible secular parables from other religions can exist for Christianity), that one should investigate the section called “Creation and its lights”.⁸

In addition to the statement about Jesus Christ as the one light, Barth feels that another statement has to be made about the light or lights that relate *indirectly* to Jesus Christ. These are the lights or truths or words of creation. The ensuing discussion is introduced as a “delimitation”⁹ not simply to the discussion of true words, but to the whole Christological discussion of *CD* §69.2. Barth describes it as a “second statement”¹⁰ which is only indirectly Christological but which is “essential to a true and keen yet also confident understanding of everything thus far said”.¹¹ Barth highlights this delimitation by insisting that he is now addressing himself to the *creatura* which “[i]n the words of Calvin . . . is the *theatrum gloriae Dei*” or, in his own words, “the external basis of the covenant which conversely is its internal basis”.¹² The fundamental point is that creation has its own lights which declare the truth of the reality and continuing existence of creation. The truth of these lights is grounded in, but *quite distinct* from the truth of the one Word and its constitutive words: these lights “cannot be regarded as identical with, or even a parable of . . . the

⁶ Ibid. See also Karl Barth, “Mozart’s Freedom”, in *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*, trans. Clarence K. Pott (Grand Rapids: Eerdmanns, 1986), 56-7.

⁷ *CD* IV/3, 135.

⁸ Geoffrey W. Bromiley contends that here Barth reconsiders the question of a second and subsidiary line or strand which he considered in *CD* II/1 (see Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth* (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1979), 221). In a conversation the author had with Dr. Hans-Anton Drewes at the Barth Archiv in Basel on 8th August 2006, Drewes stated that he understood this short text to be a “silent conversation” between Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar.

⁹ *CD* IV/3, 135.

¹⁰ Ibid., 136.

¹¹ Ibid., 135.

¹² Ibid., 137.

kingdom of heaven". He continues immediately: "The world as such can produce no parables of the kingdom of heaven".¹³

The most telling distinction between the words and the lights "which must be underlined"¹⁴ is that between the *unity* of all the words with each other and the Word on the one hand, and the *partial and discrete* character of the lights on the other. The words are themselves segments of a periphery and as such "point to the whole of the periphery and therefore to the centre";¹⁵ the lights "make themselves known only as partial truths . . . none of them is the one whole truth".¹⁶

The Basic Claim

Barth's basic claim in this short section of §69.2 is that there are truths which belong to creation *qua* creation. There are various features of creation which, accessible through "the application of the good but limited gift of common sense",¹⁷ point to the order of creation itself as something "lasting, persistent and constant".¹⁸ They are "created lights which shine and may be seen . . . in and with the being of the creaturely world".¹⁹ They declare the "orders", "limits" and "directions" in which human and all other creaturely life is lived.²⁰ As they point to the order and being of creation, they are reminders that creation is creation and not chaos: they "shed a certain brightness in the darkness and resist the onslaught of gloom".²¹

Barth does not specify particular lights in detail; instead he describes the features of creation which gives it its luminous character. Firstly, he refers to the existence (*Dasein*) of the whole cosmos as an existence of reciprocal objectivity and subjectivity between its constituent parts.²² Secondly, this existence is said to be dynamic rather than static, thus allowing for "constant discovery, concealment and

¹³ Ibid., 143.

¹⁴ Ibid., 136.

¹⁵ Ibid., 122.

¹⁶ Ibid., 159.

¹⁷ Ibid., 143.

¹⁸ Ibid., 142.

¹⁹ Ibid., 141.

²⁰ Ibid., 157. This is also intimated in Barth's exposition of the creation of the heavenly lights in Genesis 1:14-19 (see *CD* III/1, 156-158).

²¹ Ibid., 142.

²² See *ibid.*, 143-4, *KD* IV/3, 162.

rediscovery".²³ Thirdly, "the rhythm of existence" is difficult to describe in neutral terms; it is predicated on a certain "inner contrariety" (*inneren Gegensätzlichkeit*) in creation.²⁴ Fourthly, there is the susceptibility of the world to its partial description by "natural and spiritual laws".²⁵ Fifthly, and, most importantly, as well as revealing "occurrence", the world summons and invites its "active ordering and shaping of things and therefore . . . freedom".²⁶ Alongside "contemplation and apprehension" there is "choice and volition", as well as "decisions and action".²⁷ The creature is thus engaged in "teleological interpretation, planning and creation" and is thus also "free in the distinguishing, seizing and realising of its own hidden possibilities".²⁸ Sixthly, there is a feature which exercises a critical function with respect to the others, namely the "depth" or "unfathomable mystery" of creation.²⁹ Barth strongly asserts that this is not the mystery of God, but a mystery immanent to the world. Its critical function is a dual one:

The mystery of creation gives salutary peace to the extent that it is a direction to keep to what we know and can do within the limit set for us, but also salutary dispeace to the extent that it is obviously a direction within this limit to ask daily what more might be known or what might be done better.³⁰

Central to Barth's argument is the fact that creation has this luminous, self-declaratory character. Equally important, however, is that such luminosity is actually perceived. Here Barth develops the idea of a "reciprocity of converse between creature and creature".³¹ The human creature knows "this world and itself within it . . . with the eyes and ears, with reason, emotion and conscience".³² But the human being does not simply know creation, she is also addressed by it:

the world created by God does not merely exist but also speaks to one at least of its creatures, i.e., to man, giving itself to be perceived by

²³ Ibid., 144.

²⁴ Ibid., 145-6, *KD* IV/3, 164.

²⁵ Ibid., 146-7.

²⁶ Ibid., 147.

²⁷ Ibid., 147-8.

²⁸ Ibid., 148.

²⁹ Ibid., 149.

³⁰ Ibid., 150.

³¹ Ibid., 141.

³² Ibid., 142.

him. And in this creature, in man, it does not merely exist but hears itself speak, receiving the message which it imparts.³³

This *conversation* is to be understood as the context in which there is issued a “summons and invitation to the active ordering and shaping of things”.³⁴ It is a conversation between the intelligible and intelligent world: “the encounter of the intelligible with the intelligent cosmos” which “awakens and stimulates . . . a spontaneous work of ordering and fashioning corresponding to the particular way it . . . is the cosmos”.³⁵ The implication is that the lights of creation provoke and stimulate creaturely activity which in turn yields practices and insights which “correspond” to the being and existence of the cosmos. To the extent that they do correspond to the being and existence of the cosmos, such insights and practices can also be described as true. For example, referring to the laws and formulae which are “discovered” and “established” on the basis of creation’s luminosity, Barth declares that they too, within the relativity that constrains all such creaturely activity, can “claim to be constant and continual . . . truths”.³⁶

The reference to “laws and formulae” is not the only concrete example of insights and practices which Barth gives in the core text. Elsewhere in *CD IV/3* Barth offers other examples which further illuminate his thought in this regard.³⁷ In one list described as “lights which illumine the cosmos”,³⁸ he includes “[s]cientific discovery, artistic intuition and creation, political revolution, moral reorientation and rearmament”.³⁹ In another list, under the heading of the “essential constants of human existence”,⁴⁰ he includes the “state”, “work”, “trade”, the “different forms of human culture”, and “religion”.⁴¹

³³ Ibid., 141.

³⁴ Ibid., 147.

³⁵ Ibid., 148.

³⁶ Ibid., 147.

³⁷ See Thompson, “Religious Diversity, Christian Doctrine and Karl Barth”, 15.

³⁸ *CD IV/3*, 501

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 743.

⁴¹ Ibid.

The truth of the lights

The “truth” of the lights ultimately rests in God in terms of their unity with the one light and of their distinction from it. Everything which Barth says about the unity of the lights with the one light is conditioned by the utter supremacy of the latter. God’s self-declaration in Jesus Christ is not “a mere irruption of some higher, original and true light”.⁴² Instead, it is the “one true light of the one truth above or alongside which there can be no other rival truth”.⁴³ Thus he asks, “Are there truths outside this one?”⁴⁴ He answers affirmatively by appealing analogously to the fact that “the creature has its being and existence outside God”.⁴⁵ Just as God is the source of that which is external to himself, so He is the source of the truth which is associated with the creature. Although God and the world “are not two elements related on one and the same level”,⁴⁶ they nevertheless

co-exist in such a way that in free grace God gives it to the world that it should be what it is as such in the way it is, deriving its own being and existence only from this gift. The same is true of the relationship between the one light of the self-declaration of God and the many lights which declare the being, existence and nature of the world created by Him.⁴⁷

Barth illustrates this claim by employing the image of a light and its rays. Negatively, Barth denies that the relationship is that of “two rays [*Brechungen*] from one and the same light, or two sides, aspects or parts of one and the same truth”.⁴⁸ Positively, the lights of creation, as rays, *refract* the one light of God’s self-declaration.

Refraction always involves varying degrees of distortion. The refracted image is not the same as the original. To see a created light is, therefore, to see something which owes its origin to the one light of life, but it is not to see that one light. As the one light rises and shines in the cosmos, “it kindles the lights with which the [cosmos] is furnished, giving them the power to shine in its own

⁴² Ibid., 152.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., *KD IV/3*, 173.

service”.⁴⁹ But despite this kindling and empowering, the lights do not participate in the declaration of the covenant. As refractions of the light, their service is not that of the witnesses to the Word,⁵⁰ but of creation’s own self-witness:

the service of the self-witness of the world that in its existence and nature it is a real world, which is sustained and upheld, which has a basis of constancy as the sphere of the occurrence and revelation of the grace of God in Jesus Christ, and which as such may have continuing essence and existence.⁵¹

Another way to conceptualize this unity and distinction is to talk about “constancy” and “history” in both creation and covenant respectively. Although “constancy” is invoked as a defining feature of the lights, Barth does not allow it to divide creation from covenant, characterized as covenant is by “history”:

On a theological estimation the important thing in the existence of this theatre and setting is not the fact that histories are found in it too, but that, even when seen and understood as history, it is a sequence and repetition of the same or very similar events . . . [And] if there are not lacking lines and continuities and constants in the life and work of Jesus Christ too, the theologically significant thing in this case is that along these lines we are dealing with history, with concrete events, not with the general features which they share but the particularity with which they take place in this way here and now.⁵²

It is therefore possible to affirm that “[t]he one order [*Die eine Ordnung*] at stake is not just uniform but multiform”; it “does not exclude the many, the particular, the change, the alteration, the diversity”⁵³ but quite definitely includes them. The Light and the lights are “not to be thought of as at cross purposes”.⁵⁴ They can “co-exist in such a way that in free grace God gives it to the world that it should be what it is as such in the way it is, deriving its own being and existence only from this gift”.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ Ibid., 153.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 159.

⁵¹ Ibid., 153.

⁵² Ibid., 137.

⁵³ Ibid., 142, *KD* IV/3, 161.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 156.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 152.

The truths of creation persist therefore even after the advent of reconciliation. As the drama of reconciliation unfolds, it does not dispense with the stage of creation. This point is made in tandem with an assertion of the persistence of creation even when it is assailed by human sin:

Even the sin of man cannot shake its constancy, whether by way of diminution, addition or alteration. But as it was and will be, it becomes a corrupted world by reason of man's sin, falling under the divine curse and being enveloped in darkness. Again, its constancy and essence are not altered even by reconciliation, even by the establishment, realisation and fulfilment of the covenant of grace between God and man, even by the life and work of Jesus Christ . . . *Creatura*, the creaturely world as such, persists both as the sphere and place of sin and also the sphere and place of the reconciliation accomplished and being accomplished in Jesus Christ.⁵⁶

Even more fundamentally, the co-existence of the Light and lights is itself grounded within the life of God. God is and remains the Creator as He reconciles the world to Himself: "If what He does as the Founder and Lord of this covenant is not the same as what He does as Creator, He does not do either without the other, but does both simultaneously and in co-ordination."⁵⁷ This emphasis on the persistence of God's identity as Creator and on his work of creation establishes, in turn, a link between the truths of creation and God's providential care of creation:

The work of His creative grace has in view His reconciling grace. But the converse is also true, so that He is always the Guarantor, Sustainer and Protector of His creaturely world, of the cosmos or nature, thus giving it constancy in the being with which he endowed it at creation.⁵⁸

The functions of the lights

Barth ascribes two different sets of functions to the lights. The first set are the functions which they exercise in the role given to them as lights of creation *per se*. The second set are the functions which they acquire in the process which Barth describes as their "institution and integration"⁵⁹ into the one light.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 138.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 153.

Firstly, then, their function as lights of creation *per se* is limited. Their limited power and authority is repeatedly contrasted with the absolute power and authority of the one light. Barth acknowledges that these lights enlighten the human condition: its “possibilities, situation and environment”.⁶⁰ Yet he equally insists that even as they enlighten, they “bring . . . no shattering news of promise” nor any “shattering word of command”.⁶¹

Notwithstanding their relativity, these lights nevertheless perform the constructive function of establishing the “orders”, “limits” and “directions” of creation.⁶² Again, Barth seeks to distinguish such order from monotony, uniformity and the absolute absence of history. It is the mutuality of its history and its constancy that distinguishes creation and its lights from brute fate. It is for this reason that creation’s luminosity can evoke the human response and action which contributes to the establishment of order in the world.

What Barth also does is link this order-sustaining function of these lights with the language of his doctrine of providence. They are a force, albeit a relative one, against “chaos”.⁶³ Their light is real light and, although it does not conquer the darkness, it nevertheless confronts the darkness, and in so doing, constrains and limits it. As these lights “point to this order . . . they shed a certain brightness in the darkness and resist the onslaught of gloom. They draw attention to something that counts, and must always be taken into account.”⁶⁴ Their function thus parallels and is, in fact, intrinsic to the relative but indispensable function of God’s providential relationship to the world marred by human sin:

And for all the conceivable and actual error of man concerning God, his fellows and himself, their terrestrial truth in all its relativity is at least an obstacle to the onrush of chaos into the terrestrial life so severely threatened by these errors.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Ibid., 155.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., 157.

⁶³ Ibid., 142.

⁶⁴ Ibid. See *CD* III/3, 73-8 for Barth’s treatment of providence as protection against chaos.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 141.

Secondly, the main thrust of Barth's comments on the function of these lights, and their "institution and integration" into the one light, is that what they once did relatively, they now do absolutely.⁶⁶ Whether it be with respect to their only relatively binding character, their discrete and partial nature, or their lack of finality, the constant refrain of this discussion is that "what they lack may be acquired".⁶⁷ They can acquire "absolutely binding"⁶⁸ force; they can speak of the "unity and totality declared in the Word of God; they can blend their voices with that of God".⁶⁹ They can also be "invested with the glorious finality of God and His action towards man".⁷⁰

In short, whereas the lights, as lights of creation, are never described as witnesses to the one Truth, Barth now states that "what is lacking to the self-attestations of the creature . . . they can acquire as and when God Himself begins to speak and claims and uses them in His service".⁷¹ In other words, they "achieve what they could not be or do of themselves".⁷² This achievement rests on the fact that they are "taken [*erhoben*], lifted [*aufgehoben*], assumed [*angenommen und hineingenommen*] and integrated [*integriert*] into the action of God's self-giving and self-declaring"⁷³ to humanity and to the world. In the power of this integration they are "instituted, installed and ordained to the *ministerium Verbi Divini*".⁷⁴

This is the language of true words or parables.⁷⁵ These parallels are reinforced when Barth links this process of institution and integration to the process of disclosure and concealment which characterises every event of the knowledge of God. The limited power of the creaturely lights "can be invested with the absolute power of the Word of God, or conversely . . . the absolute power of the Word of God can invest itself with the limited power of creaturely self-witness".⁷⁶ The Word can, says Barth, "conceal its divine force, value and validity in the relative force, value

⁶⁶ Ibid., 156.

⁶⁷ See *ibid.*, 156, 159, 164.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 157.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 159.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 164.

⁷¹ Ibid., 159.

⁷² Ibid., 157.

⁷³ Ibid., 164.

⁷⁴ Ibid., *KD* IV/3, 188.

⁷⁵ See *ibid.*, 113.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 157.

and validity of such creaturely self-witness, and yet in this very concealment be God's self-declaration and as such absolutely binding".⁷⁷

But how should the Church relate to the lights of creation?

Later in *CD* IV/3, in §72.4, "The Ministry of the Community", when Barth is considering the limits of the community's ministry, he briefly returns to the issue of the lights of creation. He acknowledges that they can legitimately be "recognised, acknowledged, confessed and attested".⁷⁸ But it is not the Christian community that attests them. That task, he says, "is to be left to their own authorised or unauthorised prophets".⁷⁹ But nor is the Christian community licensed to ignore them. He even allows them – within certain parameters – to be "significant" for the community:

They may, of course, be significant to the community and worthy of its consideration. Nothing human can be wholly out of place in the sphere of its own task. According to the circumstances of the case all the factors and lights which under God's providence are operative in the sphere of His creation and important to man deserve its serious and even zealous attention. But it does not stand in the service of any of the factors or lights in question. . . . It cannot appropriate them nor inscribe them on its own banner.⁸⁰

The parallel argument that the just state is a parable of the Kingdom

Even though Barth does not explicitly state that the lights of creation can become parables of the kingdom of heaven, Thompson correctly believes that the argument in which they are set "almost exactly parallels" that which is associated with Barth's application of the just state as a parable (analogy) of the Kingdom of God:⁸¹

Barth makes it very clear that if the State is a *Gleichnis* of the Kingdom of God, it is a product first and foremost of God's providential rule and bears no mark of revelation. Indeed, it is precisely this insistence on denying the State any revelatory function that must be set beside the claim that as a *Gleichnis* the State corresponds to the Kingdom of God.⁸²

⁷⁷ Ibid. See also *ibid.*, 112-3.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 837.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ See Thompson, " 'As open to the world as any theologian could be . . .': Karl Barth's Account of Extra-Ecclesial Truth and Its Value to Christianity's Encounter with Other Religious Traditions", 194.

⁸² Ibid., 195.

In Hunsinger's words, the state, as part of "*redeemed creation*", exists as "a theatre for the glory of God".⁸³ As a theatre and one of "the essential constants of human existence",⁸⁴ it is an arena for the parables of the Kingdom of God,⁸⁵ in particular the highly "significant"⁸⁶ basic human desire for justice.

The relationship between the State and the Church

For Barth, the command of God to humanity has a "political form" which is "the call of God to the state" and should be considered "in the context of the doctrine of reconciliation".⁸⁷ The state is therefore "not an order of creation" (*Schöpfungsordnung*), but "a genuine and specific order of the covenant" (*Bundesordnung*).⁸⁸ Willis contends that "[t]his means that the State and the command of God to it are ordered exclusively along the lines of the reconciling grace by which humanity is justified in Jesus Christ"⁸⁹. The power of the state is given continuance and meaning only as an "ordinance of God and the kingly rule of His Son".⁹⁰ In Hunsinger's words, the state is "a part of the redeemed creation . . . because all power in heaven and on earth has been given to *our risen Lord, Jesus Christ*".⁹¹

Willis believes that when "the State is viewed from the perspective of redemption . . . it is placed in a definite parallelism with the Christian community".⁹² Barth writes that both the Christian community and the state are provisional orders "of divine grace".⁹³ As Willis notes, then, [t]hey are indicative of the patience of

⁸³ George Hunsinger, "Karl Barth and Radical Politics: Some further considerations", *Studies in Religion*, 7.2 (1978), 184. See also Eberhard Jüngel, *Christ, Justice and Peace: Towards a Theology of the State*, trans. D. Bruce Hamill and Alan J. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), 28-9.

⁸⁴ CD IV/3, 743.

⁸⁵ Clifford Green contends that these parables include socialism, "the relation of man and woman, and the church" (see Clifford J. Green, 'Introduction', in *Karl Barth: Theologian of Freedom*, ed. Clifford J. Green (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 43).

⁸⁶ CD IV/3, 837.

⁸⁷ CD III/4, 303.

⁸⁸ Ibid., KD III/4, 343.

⁸⁹ Willis, *The Ethics of Karl Barth*, 392.

⁹⁰ CD II/2, 721.

⁹¹ Hunsinger, "Karl Barth and Radical Politics: Some further considerations", 185.

⁹² Willis, *The Ethics of Karl Barth*, 392.

⁹³ Karl Barth, "The Christian Community and the Civil Community", in *Community, State and Church* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, Double Day & Company, 1960), 156. See also Karl

God in allowing man time to respond to the event of reconciliation, and so form the counterparts, in the anthropological sphere, to the continuing prophetic witness and self-manifestation of Christ in the Holy Spirit.”⁹⁴

Within the present action of Christ, the Christian community recognises the “true political authority” of the state and “its special mission includes sharing the responsibility for the execution of this [the state’s] authority”.⁹⁵ Every member of the Church, “because of the mercy of God”, must submit to its political authority.⁹⁶ Echoing the argument for the lights of creation, Barth argues that the state provides the ordered context within which the “collective life” of humanity can be maintained, and the Gospel preached.⁹⁷ Although the state is established only by the grace of God’s patience, it is itself a “graceless order”, one of “the sword, compulsion and fear”, directed by “the rule of law”. This is because the “grace of God is not yet known and exalted” here. It has not yet found obedience.⁹⁸

Willis contends that the fact that the state and the Christian community are both placed under the present rule of Christ over the world means that they will not be free or able to carry out their activities independently of each other:

There is a mutual orientation of the Christian community on the State, and of the State on the Christian community. Each in its own way, and in continuous interaction with the other, is put to the direct service of God. Naturally, this will mean rather different things for each, for the State participates in reconciliation, and so in the kingly rule of Christ, only *de iure*, while the existence and action of the Christian community marks the occurrence of a transition from a participation “in principle” in reconciliation to an involvement in it “in fact”. It follows from this that the State will have a real, though unrecognized and unacknowledged task to perform vis-à-vis reconciliation, which places a corresponding task upon the Christian community as regards the State’s fulfilment of its task. It is at precisely this point that the *political* responsibility of the community becomes clear, and that its

Barth, *Christengemeinde und Bürgergemeinde*, Theologische Studien, Heft 20 (Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag A.G. Zollikon, 1946), 9.

⁹⁴ Willis, *The Ethics of Karl Barth*, 392.

⁹⁵ *CD* II/2, 721.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 722.

distinctive service to the State, which is correlated with the service of the State to the Church, can be indicated.⁹⁹

The Christian community is called to the political service of the state by virtue of its knowledge that the latter “belongs originally and ultimately to Jesus Christ”.¹⁰⁰ In its “comparatively independent substance, in its dignity, its function, and its purpose”, it is “to serve the Person and the Work of Jesus Christ and therefore the justification of the sinner”.¹⁰¹ The power of the state is legitimate because it comes wholly from God. The state manifests “the operation of a divine ordinance . . . an *exousia* which is and acts in accordance with the will of God”.¹⁰² Even the power of a corrupt state, such as that represented by Pilate, is still ordained and preserved by God. Just as there is no such thing as a “perfect political system”, so too even the worst state can never be termed “wholly diabolical”.¹⁰³

The service of the Christian community to the state is directed toward the establishment and maintenance of a just political order. Christians can only “will and affirm a state which is based on justice”.¹⁰⁴ A Christian “cannot avoid the question of human rights”.¹⁰⁵ It is in light of this fact that the community recognizes and accepts the authority of the state, and intercedes for it in prayer. It does this knowing that the state “is not in the habit of praying”; but it prays, making itself responsible for the state.¹⁰⁶ Willis contends that this does not mean that “the Church retreats into quietism in the political sphere, nor that it is prepared to sanction any form of political order”.¹⁰⁷ He continues:

The fact that the service of the community to the State is marked initially by subordination and prayer indicates that the Church brings

⁹⁹ Willis, *The Ethics of Karl Barth*, 392-3.

¹⁰⁰ Karl Barth, “Church and State”, in *Community, State and Church* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, Double Day & Company, 1960), 118.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. Compare this with the comparatively independent nature of the little lights of creation which indirectly point to the Light of Christ. The function of the just state parallels the function of the lights, a function which is intrinsic to God’s providential relationship to the world marred by human sin.

¹⁰² Barth, “The Christian Community and the Civil Community”, 156. See also *Christengemeinde und Bürgergemeinde*, 9.

¹⁰³ Karl Barth, “The Christian Community in the Midst of Political Change” in *Against the Stream: Shorter Post-War Writings 1946-1952*, trans. R.G. Smith and S. Goodman (London: SCM, 1949), 81.

¹⁰⁴ CD II/1, 387.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Barth, “The Christian Community and the Civil Community”, 159.

¹⁰⁷ Willis, *The Ethics of Karl Barth*, 394.

no ideological program of its own into the political sphere. It does not need – indeed, is forbidden – to play off opposing ideologies against each other.¹⁰⁸

Although the state has a service to perform to the Church, and so to all humanity, the subordination and prayer which the Christian community gives the state is not dependent on the state's prior fulfilment or recognition of the service required of it. Indeed, "the most brutally unjust State cannot lessen the responsibility of the Church for the State: indeed, it can only increase it".¹⁰⁹ In Willis' words:

The Church will always hope for and expect the best from the State, but it will continue to render obedience to it, and pray for it, regardless. The prayer and obedience of the community function as signs of its recognition of the divine grounding of the State, and of its willingness to be actively *for* its well-being.¹¹⁰

The freedom of the community from ideological commitment in the political sphere does not mean that it has no criteria by which to measure the validity or invalidity of a given political form. The recognition and obedience given by the Church to the political community do not always mean active support and encouragement for its practices. Indeed, the "intercession" of the Christian community on behalf of the state can, on occasion, take the form of "criticism", and even "resistance".¹¹¹ This is done "not *against* the State but as the Church's service *for* the State".¹¹²

Echoing his argument for the relationship between the Word and words, Barth sees the relationship between the Christian community and the civil community as likened to two concentric circles where "the State forms the outer circle within which the Church, with the mystery of faith and the gospel, is the inner

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Barth, "Church and State", 136.

¹¹⁰ Willis, *The Ethics of Karl Barth*, 394.

¹¹¹ Barth, "Church and State", 139. Cf. *The Knowledge of God and the Service of God according to the Teaching of the Reformation*, 229-32. Here Barth considers the Scots Confession and when, under certain conditions, resistance to the political order may taken in the form of *active* resistance.

¹¹² Ibid.

circle”.¹¹³ They share a common centre directly related to “the order of divine salvation and grace”.¹¹⁴ Willis describes their relationship thus:

Within the creaturely sphere, both Church and State are placed in the service of God as “agents of reconciliation”, for both are called into existence at the point of man’s justification. The task of the Christian community is the continuous proclamation of that event in its witness and service to the world in its varied activities: preaching and teaching, the celebration of the sacraments, prayer, and its common participation with all men in the spheres and relationships that make up the context of creaturely occurrence. The task of the State is that of providing and maintaining a framework within which the common life of humanity may be carried on in an atmosphere that is marked by an active concern for, and defence of, justice.¹¹⁵

Though it “is not yet the order of faith and love”, the correct order of the state must be “outward justice, outward peace and outward freedom”.¹¹⁶ As the state is claimed by the Christian community for preservation of justice, peace and freedom, it must “remain within the bounds of justice and within the bounds of its task”.¹¹⁷ Put succinctly, the service to which the civil community is called is:

the safeguarding of both the external, relative and provisional freedom of the individuals and the external, relative peace of their community and to that extent the safeguarding of the external, relative and provisional humanity of their life both as individuals and as a community.¹¹⁸

When the state remains faithful to the service required of it, and provides a political order in which humanity’s individual and corporate life is grounded in a concern for justice, it also ensures the one thing needed by the Church for its particular activity of proclamation: the preservation of freedom.¹¹⁹ When this condition is fulfilled, the Christian community can cooperate actively in the life of

¹¹³ Barth, “The Christian Community and the Civil Community”, 169.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 170.

¹¹⁵ Willis, *The Ethics of Karl Barth*, 395.

¹¹⁶ Barth, *The Knowledge of God and the Service of God according to the Teaching of the Reformation*, 221. Barth writes: “The State is not yet God’s eternal Kingdom but is the promise of this latter in the midst of the chaos of the Kingdom of this world” (ibid.).

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 224.

¹¹⁸ Barth, “The Christian Community and the Civil Community”, 150.

¹¹⁹ Barth, *The Knowledge of God and the Service of God according to the Teaching of the Reformation*, 226.

the state – praying for it, encouraging it and affirming its general policy and direction. It can do this only when:

the significance of the State as service of God is made clear and credible to us by the State itself, by its attitude and acts, its intervening on behalf of justice, peace and freedom and its conduct towards the church.¹²⁰

The state cannot claim more than the co-operation of the Church. It cannot legitimately make an “inward claim” upon people either through the imposition of a “particular philosophy of life (*Weltanschauung*)”, or by exacting a response of “love” from its people: “love is not one of the duties which we owe to the State”.¹²¹ Nor can there be any confusion or exchange of the respective tasks given the state and the Christian community. The state cannot undertake to instruct the Church in the performance of its task of preaching the Gospel, nor seek to effect a reform in its order and life. The state cannot “gradually develop . . . into a Church”.¹²² By the same token, the Church cannot attempt to become a political power in its own right, lobbying for special attention and privilege. Nor can it wish to turn the state into an extension of itself by fostering the development of a “Church-State” (*Kirchenstaat*).¹²³ Its sole task lies in the proclamation that “by grace, once and for all, God has gathered up sinful [humanity] into the person of Jesus . . . He has set [humanity] free for the enjoyment of life . . .”¹²⁴ Within the political order, the Church will always be a “*παροικία*”, an “establishment among strangers”.¹²⁵

No state is wholly just or wholly unjust. There are, however, in the political sphere, guidelines that enable the Christian community to distinguish between the relative merits of possible arrangements, and to participate “in the human search for the best form, for the most fitting system of political organization”.¹²⁶ It is by participating in an ordinary, human way in the search for a political order in which justice is given at least a relative, provisional embodiment that the Church

¹²⁰ Ibid., 227.

¹²¹ Barth, “Church and State”, 143.

¹²² Barth, “The Christian Community and the Civil Community”, 166.

¹²³ Ibid. See also *Christengemeinde und Bürgergemeinde*, 20.

¹²⁴ Barth, “Church and State”, 127.

¹²⁵ Ibid. Cf. Barth, “The Christian Community and the Civil Community”, 160-1.

¹²⁶ Barth, “The Christian Community and the Civil Community”, 161.

“subordinates” itself to the political community, and “calls the State from neutrality, ignorance and paganism into co-responsibility before God”.¹²⁷

The most complete statement of the guidelines marking the direction in which justice is to be sought in the political order is given in Barth’s 1946 essay, “The Christian Community and the Civil Community” (*Christengemeinde und Bürgergemeinde*).¹²⁸ Barth establishes these guidelines by analogy. The justification for this procedure lies in the fact that “a simple and absolute heterogeneity” between the Christian and civil communities on the one hand and “a simple and absolute equating” on the other is simply “out of the question” as regards their relationship.¹²⁹ They are unified ontologically in Jesus Christ, and the reconciliation of all humanity that has taken place in him:

The only possibility that remains . . . is to regard the State as an allegory, as a correspondence and an analogue to the Kingdom of God which the Church proclaims and believes in. Since the State forms the outer circle within which the Church, with the mystery of its faith and gospel, is the inner circle, since it shares a common centre with Church, it is inevitable that, although its presuppositions and its tasks are its own and different, it is nevertheless capable of reflecting indirectly the truth and reality which constitute the Christian community.¹³⁰

The hope of the future promised to humanity in Christ, in the “new age” already “dawning in power”, provides the point at which the Christian community is united with the state, and enables it to discern the activity of God in the provisional

¹²⁷ Ibid., 162, 171.

¹²⁸ According to Barth, this was itself merely an exposition of Barmen’s fifth thesis which reads: “Scripture tells us that by divine appointment the state, in this still unredeemed world in which also the church is situated, has the task of maintaining justice and peace, so far as human discernment and human ability make this possible, by means of the threat and use of force. The church acknowledges with gratitude and reverence toward God the benefit of this, his appointment. It draws attention to God’s Kingdom (*Reich*), God’s commandment and justice, and with these the responsibility of those who rule and those who are ruled. It trusts and obeys the power of the Word, by which God upholds all things. We reject the false doctrine that beyond its special commission the state should and could become the sole and total order of human life and so fulfil the vocation of the church as well. We reject the false doctrine that beyond its special commission the church should and could take on the nature, tasks and dignity which belong to the state and thus become itself an organ of the state” (Karl Barth, “Theology for the Christian Community: The Barmen Declaration”, in *Karl Barth: Theologian of Freedom*, ed. Clifford J. Green (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 150).

¹²⁹ Barth, “The Christian Community and the Civil Community”, 169.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

efforts of humanity to secure “rights of citizenship” for all in the political order.¹³¹ In choosing from “[a]mong the alternatives open at any particular moment [the Church] will choose those which most suggest a correspondence to, an analogy and a reflection of, the content of its own faith and gospel”.¹³² The Church will always support the decisions of the state which clarify rather than obscure “the Lordship of Jesus Christ”.¹³³ The concern of the Christian community is that the political decisions taken by the state “point towards the Kingdom of God, not away from it”.¹³⁴ In general terms, the Church proceeds to the task of political decision by distinguishing

between the just and the unjust State, that is, between the better or worse political form and reality exhibited at a given time; between order and caprice; between government and tyranny; between freedom and anarchy; between community and collectivism; between personal rights and individualism; between the State as described in Romans 13 and the State as described in Rev. 13.¹³⁵

These general considerations can be made more specific by deeper use of the principle of analogy. Because the Church is “based on the knowledge of the one eternal God”, the Christian community will be “interested primarily in human beings and not in some abstract cause or other” – not even when the abstraction in question is labelled “progress”.¹³⁶ The human counterpart to divine justification is the relative, provisional justice that can be secured in the context of politics. The Church, as the “witness of the divine justification”, will favour the state that is based on “a commonly acknowledged law” under which no one is exempt and which provides equal protection to all.¹³⁷ That means that “the Church will be found where all political activity is . . . regulated by law” (as in a constitutional state), and never found on the side of “anarchy or tyranny”.¹³⁸

¹³¹ Barth, “Church and State”, 123, 125.

¹³² Barth, “The Christian Community and the Civil Community”, 170.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 162.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 171.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 172.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

The Son of Man came to “seek and to save the lost”.¹³⁹ The Church will therefore concern itself particularly with those who are “poor, the socially and economically weak and threatened” and will always insist upon the state’s “special responsibility” for these weaker members of society.¹⁴⁰ In doing so it will choose from one of the “socialistic possibilities” which ensures the “greatest measure of social justice”.¹⁴¹ The Christian community is “the fellowship of those who are freely called by the Word of grace and the Spirit and love of God to be the children of God”.¹⁴² For Barth this means that, in political terms, the Church is concerned with the safeguarding of individual liberty of expression and decision.¹⁴³ It will not necessarily oppose a “partial, and temporary limitation of these freedoms”, but it will stand resolutely against “any out-and-out dictatorship such as the totalitarian State”.¹⁴⁴

The individual and corporate dimensions of the Christian community are creatively united through the common loyalty of its members to Christ. The analogue to this in the civil community is that neither “individualism” nor “collectivism” can be given “the last word”.¹⁴⁵ Both the interests of individuals and of the “whole” (the state) are subordinated to the “being of the citizen, the being of the civil community before the law”.¹⁴⁶ This will best limit and preserve humanity’s existence in both its individual and corporate manifestations.¹⁴⁷

The Christian community, because of its “Baptism in one Spirit”, is a visible sign of the unity of all humanity in Christ.¹⁴⁸ Within the political sphere, then, the Church will “stand for the equality of the freedom and responsibility of all adult citizens”.¹⁴⁹ This means that there can be no legitimate restriction of the equality of all persons under the law, whether this is based on considerations of religion, class,

¹³⁹ Ibid., 173.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 173-4.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 174.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 175.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

racial background or sex.¹⁵⁰ The Church manifests in its life a “variety of gifts and tasks.”¹⁵¹ The analogue to this in the state is that proper separation be maintained between its various functions and “powers” – legislative, executive and judicial¹⁵²: “Justice in the body politic is more readily approximated when these are decentralized.”¹⁵³

Since the Church lives by the truth revealed to all in Jesus Christ, it will oppose “all secret policies and secret diplomacy”, and will work for “freedom and responsibility” and the creation and preservation of a political order in which officials are willing (and able) “to answer openly for all their actions”.¹⁵⁴ The Christian community is “established and nourished” in the completely free Word of God.¹⁵⁵ It will therefore stand for freedom of expression in the civil community, and will oppose attempts to regiment, control or censor this freedom.¹⁵⁶

The Church is called into existence only to serve God and its fellow-humanity. Legitimate ruling of the state as *potestas* will always be a form of service to the people.¹⁵⁷ The Church will therefore oppose political orders grounded only in the exercise of “naked power” (*Macht an sich*) which is “directly evil”.¹⁵⁸ As the people of God called to service in the world, the Christian community is by nature ecumenical, and so open to all humanity without limitation. The corollary to this in the political order is a sensitivity to the wider contexts and dimensions of political responsibility that lead beyond “parochial politics” (*Kirchturmpolitik*).¹⁵⁹

Finally, although it may be necessary from time to time to sanction “violent solutions” to conflicts that arise within the political community – whether in the form “police measures” or “law court decisions”, or a revolt against an unjust state – these will always need to be undertaken only “when they are for the moment the ultimate

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid., 175-6.

¹⁵³ Willis, *The Ethics of Karl Barth*, 398.

¹⁵⁴ Barth, “The Christian Community and the Civil Community”, 176.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 177.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 177. See also *Christengemeinde und Bürgergemeinde*, 31.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 178. See also *Christengemeinde und Bürgergemeinde*, 32.

and the only possibility available".¹⁶⁰ A definite restriction of force to those situations in which, *ultima ratio*, no other course of action is possible, forms the analogue, in the political order, to the fleetingness of God's anger as contrasted with his mercy, which is "for eternity".¹⁶¹

The Christian community performs its necessary service to the state when it assists in the formation and maintenance of a political order in which these guidelines have at least a partial embodiment. In this way, the state is supported (by the Church) in its attempt to fulfil the command of God to strive to achieve *justice*.

Democracy

The "Christian choices and purposes in politics" set out by Barth in "The Christian Community and the Civil Community" demonstrate a tendency towards a democratic state.¹⁶² For example, in *The Church and the Political Problem of Our Day*, Barth exclaims that democracy bestows "the power and blessing of justice, of freedom and of responsibility"¹⁶³ where democratic justice is "that heavenly gift", "that remnant of a free humanity . . . and . . . of the freedom of the Gospel".¹⁶⁴ He argues that for Christians the fulfilment of political duty means, not mere passive subjection, but "responsible choice of authority, responsible decision about the validity of laws, responsible care for their maintenance".¹⁶⁵ Therefore, it is no accident that "in the course of time "democratic" states have come into being, states, that is, which are based upon the responsible activity of their citizens".¹⁶⁶ The "democratic conception of the State" is in fact "a justifiable expansion of the thought of the New Testament".¹⁶⁷

But the just state, according to Barth, is not merely democratic: it is also *social* democratic. Its proper function is to "discriminate between Right from Wrong

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 178-9.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 178.

¹⁶² Ibid., 181.

¹⁶³ Barth, *The Church and the Political Problem of Our Day*, 70.

¹⁶⁴ Barth, "First Letter to French Protestants", in *A Letter to Great Britain from Switzerland*, trans. E. H. Gordon and G. Hill (London: Sheldon Press and New York: Macmillan, 1941), 40.

¹⁶⁵ Barth, "Church and State", 144.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 145.

in the lives of all men and to set certain bounds for their conduct”.¹⁶⁸ It also serves to check humanity’s “presumption” to sin and the destructive consequences to which this “presumption” can lead.¹⁶⁹ To this negative function Barth adds a positive one – the promotion of peace and social democracy.¹⁷⁰ The Christian concept of “the righteous state . . . contradicts and withstands all political, social, and economic tyranny and anarchy. . . . *democracy* comes nearer to that ideal state than aristocratic or monarchical dictatorship, *socialism* than an untrammelled capitalistic order”.¹⁷¹ The just state therefore concerns itself not merely with justice but with social justice.¹⁷²

However, there is no such thing as a perfect political system for Barth.¹⁷³ There will never be a perfect constitutional state this side of Judgement Day.¹⁷⁴ In this present, sinful age,¹⁷⁵ in which the world needs redemption,¹⁷⁶ no state is immune from the temptation “to become at least a little Leviathan”,¹⁷⁷ nor is any state without sin. On the contrary, “it requires and will always require restoration”.¹⁷⁸ Consequently, even a just state cannot hope to achieve more than “an external, relative and provisional humanisation of man’s existence”.¹⁷⁹ It is only a provisional order. At best, then, it will constitute “an allegory . . . a correspondence and an analogue to the kingdom of God”; reflecting it, but never exactly being it.¹⁸⁰

¹⁶⁸ Barth, “A Letter to Great Britain from Switzerland”, 13.

¹⁶⁹ Barth, “The Christian Community and the Civil Community”, 155.

¹⁷⁰ CD III/4, 458-9.

¹⁷¹ Karl Barth, “A Letter to American Christians”, in *The Church and the War* (New York: Macmillan, 1994), 39.

¹⁷² Accordingly, in 1941, Barth urged the government of wartime Switzerland to admit the Social Democratic Party into its ranks, and to address the problem of the growing disparity between an economically comfortable minority and a non-propertied and low-paid majority which was immediately vulnerable to the effects of rapid price-inflation. It took more than two years for this demand to be fulfilled. See Karl Barth, “Im Namen Gottes des Allmächtigen!” in *Eine schweizer Stimme, 1938-45* (Zollikon-Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag AG, 1945), 219-21. See also Frank Jehle, *Ever Against the Stream: The Politics of Karl Barth, 1906-1968* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 76.

¹⁷³ Barth, “The Christian Community in the Midst of Political Change”, 81.

¹⁷⁴ Barth, “From a Discussion in Budapest on the Morning of April 1, 1948” in *Against the Stream*, ed. R. G. Smith, trans. E. M. Delacour and Stanley Godman (London: SCM, 1954), 96.

¹⁷⁵ Barth, “Church and State”, 148.

¹⁷⁶ Barth, “The Christian Community in the Midst of Political Change”, 84.

¹⁷⁷ Barth, *The Christian Life, Church Dogmatics, IV/4, Lecture Fragments*, 221.

¹⁷⁸ Barth, “The Church and the Political Problem”, 77.

¹⁷⁹ Barth, “The Christian Community and the Civil Community”, 161.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 169.

Strictly speaking then, for Barth no state can be properly called “just”, if by “just” what is meant is something absolute and direct. On this account, John Howard Yoder criticizes the translations of *Rechtfertigung und Recht* and *Christengemeinde und Bürgergemeinde* in the collection edited by Will Herberg:¹⁸¹

Herberg’s texts consistently translate *Rechtsstaat* in ways which contribute to reinforcing a wrong concept. Sometimes it is rendered “legitimate state” and sometimes “just state”. For each of these, a different German expression would be used. Each of these fosters the idea of ruling that certain *other* states are *unjust* or *illegitimate*, and the state we approve is somehow positively righteous. This is not what *Rechtsstaat* means. . . . What is meant is that a state is thought of as recognising, implementing and being bound by some thinkable *justice* beyond itself and its arbitrary judgements. The “justice-state” is the modest, self-limiting state. It will still not be just or righteous; but it has set its moral limits. The alternative to *Rechtsstaat* is not “unjust state” or “illegitimate state” but arbitrary authority.¹⁸²

Biggar contends that Yoder is correct in arguing that *Rechtsstaat* means a state which recognizes the claims of justice upon it and is committed to its implementation:

A *Rechtsstaat* is a State which *intends* justice; not one which enjoys identity with it. However, this absolute intention does manifest itself in the relatively effective rule of law over power by which the rights of the individual are balanced against the claims of the community. The intention is made visible in political forms. . . . “it can be measured in the formal commitments of both persons and structures”. For that reason, it is appropriate to translate *Rechtsstaat* as “constitutional state”.¹⁸³

Biggar points out that although the *Rechtsstaat* will never be perfectly just, its intention of justice – “expressed with greater or lesser success in the constitutional and legal forms that govern and shape its political practice – and its concomitant

¹⁸¹ See Barth, *Community, State, and Church*. *Rechtfertigung und Recht* was translated by G. Ronald Howe under the title “Church and State”. *Christengemeinde und Bürgergemeinde* was translated by Stanley Godman under the title “The Christian Community and the Civil Community”.

¹⁸² John H. Yoder, *Karl Barth and the Problem of War* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970), 125 n. 5.

¹⁸³ Nigel Biggar, *The Hastening That Awaits: Karl Barth’s Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 171.

legitimacy make it sufficiently distinguishable from the *Unrechtsstaat*, and especially from its tyrannical form, the *Totalstaat*” :¹⁸⁴

. . . this visible distinction between order and caprice, between government and tyranny, between freedom and anarchy, between community and collectivism, between personal rights and individualism, is a *moral* distinction, albeit a relative one; a distinction between the morally better and the morally worse and, in that sense, between just (*rechte*) and unjust (*unrechte*) States. The absolute intentional distinction between States expresses itself in a relative moral one. Therefore, “in the better kind of state” (*in jenem jeweils “Besseren”, im jeweils rechten Staat*) we are able to glimpse the purpose or intention of the divine ordinance. . . . A State which is a *Rechtsstaat* may be only relatively *recht*, but it is positively so; and that is how it can be “better” than a State which is an *Unrechtsstaat* and therefore *unrecht*. . . . the *Rechtsstaat* will never be anything other than “better”; it will never be the “best”.¹⁸⁵

Barth rightly believes that all political forms and systems have their limitations, and no one political concept – even that of democracy – can be played off against all others.¹⁸⁶ The form of state most approximate to the Christian concept may equally well assume the form of a monarchy or aristocracy or “occasionally even . . . of a dictatorship”, as that of a democracy. No democracy as such is immune from degeneration into anarchy or tyranny and from becoming a “bad State”.¹⁸⁷ The order, justice, and freedom absolutely required by the Christian concept of the state can be frustrated under the better, democratic form of government, and can be honoured even under the worse, dictatorial one,¹⁸⁸ provided that such dictatorship is limited and provisional, not totalitarian.¹⁸⁹

Nevertheless, the Christian concept of the *Rechtsstaat* tends toward democracy;¹⁹⁰ and “on the whole towards the form of state, which, if it is not actually realized in the so-called ‘democracies’, is at any rate more or less honestly clearly intended and desired”.¹⁹¹ Therefore, “the assertion that all forms of government are

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 171-2.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 172.

¹⁸⁶ Barth, “The Christian Community and the Civil Community”, 161.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 181.

¹⁸⁸ Barth, “A Letter to American Christians”, 39-40.

¹⁸⁹ Barth, “The Christian Community and the Civil Community”, 174.

¹⁹⁰ Barth, “A Letter to American Christians”, 39.

¹⁹¹ Barth, “The Christian Community and the Civil Community”, 182.

equally compatible or incompatible with the Gospel is not only outworn but false. . . . [I]t is not true that a Christian can endorse, or seek after a mobocracy or a dictatorship as readily as a democracy.”¹⁹²

Barth believed that his own nation state of Switzerland was a *Rechtsstaat* in the sense described above. He made this judgement because he believed that Switzerland allowed itself to be confronted by the Gospel of divine justification, and thereby showed that it genuinely intended justice:

Its constitutionality, its (social) democratic structures and procedures, its balancing of the rights of the individual against the claims of the community, its pluralism, and its representation of the memory and hope of such a political order for Europe as a whole – all these Barth deemed to be expressions of its intention of justice. Because Switzerland is a *Rechtsstaat*, its national autonomy is bound up with a divine commission to attest to divine justification and therefore to real human justice.¹⁹³

Assessment of Barth's model of the just state

Barth's model of the just state and subsequent Church-State relations has often been accused of “sectarianism, fideism, and imperialism”.¹⁹⁴ Indeed Timothy Stanley contends that many scholars have decided that Karl Barth's theology is little more than “otherworldly ecclesiocentrism”¹⁹⁵ which “showed his disinterest in engaging

¹⁹² Barth, “Church and State”, 144 n. 34.

¹⁹³ Biggar, *The Hastening That Awaits*, 173. Biggar's understanding might help to explain a brief remark Barth made on a visit to the United Nations in New York City on the 24th May 1961. He stated that the international organisation *could* be “an earthly parable of the heavenly kingdom”. He qualified this by saying that “real peace will not be made here, although it might serve as an approach, but by God himself at the end of all things” (“Interview in der UNO (24.5.1962)”, in *Karl Barth Gesamtausgabe: Gespräche 1959-1962*, ed. Eberhard Busch (Zürich: TVZ, 1995), 528.

¹⁹⁴ David Fergusson, *Community, Liberalism and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 159. See for instance Jürgen Moltmann, “Barth's Doctrine of the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the Experience of the Confessing Church”, in *On Human Dignity: Political Theology and Ethics*, ed. and trans. M. D. Meeks (London: SCM Press, 1984), 79-96. See also John Howard Yoder, “The Basis of Barth's Social Ethics” (unpublished manuscript of a lecture given at Elmhurst College in September 1978 to the Midwest Chapter of the Karl Barth Society of North America) cited in George Hunsinger, “Karl Barth and the Politics of Sectarian Protestantism: a Dialogue with John Howard Yoder”, in *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth*, ed. George Hunsinger (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 115.

¹⁹⁵ Timothy Stanley, “From Habermas to Barth and Back Again”, *Journal of Church and State*, 48.1 (2006), 116.

the real world”.¹⁹⁶ Stanley is correct to argue that this interpretation needs to be challenged in light of subsequent Barth scholarship. In addition to Barth’s own statements,¹⁹⁷ Stanley points out that the works of Marquardt and Helmut Gollwitzer have “drawn out the implications of socialism upon Karl Barth’s theology”.¹⁹⁸

More recently, Nigel Biggar and John Webster have both shown the inherent connection between Barth’s theology and his ethics and politics.¹⁹⁹ Biggar, for instance, draws upon subsection 78, “The Struggle for Human Righteousness”, of the unfinished last volume of Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*. Though Biggar believes Barth’s position on political leadership became more nuanced in his later work,²⁰⁰ Stanley observes that “he nonetheless draws upon the ongoing and consummate interest Barth had in politics and ethics”:²⁰¹

The question is never whether or not Barth’s theology was oriented around political and ethical action, but how and to what degree.²⁰²

Similarly, Webster points out the way Barth saw his theology as the foreground for an *ongoing* political subtext. He draws on an example from the end of Barth’s life: In a letter to Eberhard Bethge, Barth “suggested that ethical and

¹⁹⁶ See for instance Charles C. West, *Communism and the Theologians: Study of an encounter* (London: SCM Press, 1958), 313.

¹⁹⁷ “‘Don’t forget to say that I have always been interested in politics’, remarked Karl Barth toward the end of his career, ‘and consider that it belongs to the life of a theologian. My whole cellar is full of political literature. I read it all the time. I am also an ardent reader of the newspaper’” (George Hunsinger, “Toward a Radical Barth”, in *Karl Barth and Radical Politics* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 181, citing John Deschner, “Karl Barth as Political Activist”, *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, 28 (1972), 55).

¹⁹⁸ Stanley, “From Habermas to Barth and Back Again”, 116. See Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt, “Socialism in the Theology of Karl Barth”, in *Karl Barth and Radical Politics*, ed. George Hunsinger (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 47-76. See also Helmut Gollwitzer, “Kingdom of God and Socialism in the Theology of Karl Barth”, in *Karl Barth and Radical Politics*, ed. George Hunsinger (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 77-120.

¹⁹⁹ See for instance J. B. Webster, *Barth’s Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth’s Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). See also Biggar, *The Hastening That Awaits: Karl Barth’s Ethics*.

²⁰⁰ Biggar, *The Hastening That Waits: Karl Barth’s Ethics*, 61. Biggar believes that Barth made a shift from discussing the political equality of individual and political leadership as rooted in the doctrine of creation in 1928. “By 1951, it seems, Barth had simply come to the conclusion that . . . the political form of God’s command will be discussed in the context of the doctrine of reconciliation” (60-1). His reason for arguing this point is Barth’s argument in subsection 78 of *The Christian Life: Church Dogmatics IV, 4: Lecture Fragments*.

²⁰¹ Stanley, “From Habermas to Barth and Back Again”, 117.

²⁰² Ibid.

political concerns were presupposed - even if they remained somewhat subterranean, at least in his published writings - during his first two professorships".²⁰³

In Germany, however, burdened with the problems of its Lutheran tradition, there was a genuine need in the direction which I now silently took for granted or emphasized only in passing: ethics, fellow-humanity, a serving church, discipleship, socialism, the peace movement, and in and with all these things, politics.²⁰⁴

Stanley rightly contends that "Barth was deeply invested in the political and ethical nature of theology. This compounded with the historical weight of Barth's involvement with the Confessing Church in Germany during World War II gives ample evidence that Barth was by no means politically complacent".²⁰⁵

Barth's use of analogy

What is of primary interest to this present study is Barth's attempt to provide ethical guidelines, by means of analogy, that could assist the Christian community in the "discerning of spirits"²⁰⁶ necessary to decide from the available political options in the direction of justice for everyone in society.

For Barth, human knowledge of God is analogical, a relationship of proportionality, of correspondence. But whilst acknowledging a correspondence between humanity and God, Barth denies any correspondence based on being. As Chapter 3 has affirmed, humanity's relationship to God does not derive from an analogy of being, an *analogia entis*, but an analogy of faith, an *analogia fidei*.²⁰⁷

All conceptions of natural law are based on a relationship of *analogia entis*. Here the category of being applies equally to humanity and to God. A prior

²⁰³ Webster, *Barth's Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth's Thought*, 4.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 4-5, citing Barth, *Letters 1961-1968*, 251.

²⁰⁵ Stanley, "From Habermas to Barth and Back Again", 117. See for instance the Barmen Declaration, which opens: "In view of the errors of the 'German Christians' and of the present Reich Church Administration, which are ravaging the church and at the same time also shattering the unity of the German Evangelical Church, we confess the following truths" ("Theology for the Christian Community: The Barmen Declaration", 148-9).

²⁰⁶ Barth, "Church and State", 120.

²⁰⁷ For Barth's critique of analogy's historical development see: *CD II/1*, 237-243. For his critique of *analogia entis* see: *ibid.*, 75-93. For his critique of natural theology as it relates to *analogia entis* see: *ibid.*, 93-128.

relationship exists between Creator, creation and creature that can be known and formulated apart from the knowledge of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. Being acts as an intrinsic foundation in nature, supporting the development of anthropologically based theologies. Grounding the theological task in the *analogia entis* means that:

. . . all specifically Christian truth will be only a modification of the general truth of being . . . of a being the closer interpretation of which will be abandoned to our own tender mercies, to the change and development of the different views of what deserves to be called true being. It may perhaps be moralistic being, or spiritual, or transcendental, or empirical, or humanistic, or individual. One day it may even be "German" being.²⁰⁸

Barth, in response, states categorically that, "We possess no analogy on the basis of which the nature and being of God as the Lord can be accessible to us."²⁰⁹ The basis of human analogies and correspondences do not come by right or by virtue of creation.

For Barth, God relates to humanity by way of the *analogia fidei*.²¹⁰ An *analogia fidei* is the movement of the *totaliter aliter* for humanity. "Beyond, *trans*: that is the crux of the situation; *that* is the source of our life. Our little *within* belongs to the realm of analogies, and it is from *beyond* that realm that we draw our life. There is no continuity leading from analogy over into divine reality."²¹¹ Due to this eschatological separation, initiation into a relationship of analogy occurs by a free act of divine grace – "[i]n the Bible . . . it is not a being common to God and man which finally and properly establishes and upholds the fellowship between

²⁰⁸ CD II/1, 241.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 75.

²¹⁰ Sebastian Moore argues for the priority and justification of the analogical method based on the primacy of Christ: "We tend to think of creation first, and then of the Incarnation as God's remedy for its fall. And we transpose this order into God. . . . But what *is* the Incarnation? It is the oneness of God and man in a single divine person. . . . To put the question diagrammatically: considering God as the centre, and moving out to the world, which do we encounter first? Surely the God-Man, and *then* man. . . . This gives us the vital conclusion that Christ is the clue not only to our redemption but to our creation also. He is the pattern on which we were created. . . . It is because the God-Man is the pattern of human existence that human experience can mediate divine revelation. In other words, Christ is the basis of theological analogy, and it is by him that the latter is validated." Sebastian Moore, "Analogy and Karl Barth", *The Downside Review*, 71.224 (1953), 178.

²¹¹ Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, 321.

them, but God's grace."²¹² This movement of free grace is decisive.²¹³ In particular this is God's graceful action in the person and work of Jesus Christ:

In His revelation, in Jesus Christ, the hidden God has indeed made Himself apprehensible. Not directly, but indirectly. Not to sight, but to faith. Not in His being, but in sign. Not, then, by the dissolution of His hiddenness – but apprehensibly . . . The word was made flesh: this is the first, original and controlling sign of all signs.²¹⁴

Jesus – the God-man – comes into the world as a human signification: “Jesus Christ and His visible kingdom on earth: this is the great possibility, created by God Himself, of viewing and conceiving Him, and therefore of speaking about Him”.²¹⁵ Jesus enters the world as a human being, “and therefore enters the world with all of its politics” showing humanity “that God, though totally other, is interested in humanity”.²¹⁶ Hence humanity relates to God via an analogy of God's activity in Christ.

A Political Analogy

Barth's understanding of the *analogia relationis* is given and acknowledged by the *analogia fidei*. He develops the concepts of solidarity and common humanity from his understanding of the *analogia relationis*. These concepts are discussed in light of ethical action in the world which is intimately tied to the meaning of political action where God is understood to have universal rule over all people and by analogy exemplifies this rule in Christ as a rule of love and freedom.²¹⁷ From the *analogia relationis* Barth argues for a common humanity which forms the basis for his notions of solidarity: “The individual, as important as he is, stands under the divine command together with his fellow-man as a joint-covenant partner elected by grace

²¹² CD II/1, 243.

²¹³ “The grace of God wills and creates the covenant between God and man. It therefore determines man to existence in this covenant. It determines him to be the partner of God. It therefore determines his action to correspondence, conformity, uniformity with God's action” (CD II/2, 575).

²¹⁴ CD II/1, 199.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Stanley, “From Habermas to Barth and Back Again”, 118-9.

²¹⁷ “The God who encounters us in Jesus Christ is ‘the One who loves in freedom’ ” (Clifford J. Green, “Introduction”, in *Karl Barth: Theologian of Freedom*, ed. Clifford J. Green (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 11, citing CD II/1, 257).

in Jesus Christ. Without this communality, ethics can become detached, irresponsible, and uncaring”.²¹⁸

The notion of all people being under God’s purview forms the basis for Barth to say that Christian people can act in communal ways that affirm the humanity in others.²¹⁹ Solidarity, according to Stanley, is for Barth:

... rooted in God’s sovereign call to all humanity, whether people recognize God’s calling towards them or not. God’s universal calling takes shape in the world through the church which recognizes that the content of God’s call is towards co-responsible reconciliation with God and all people. The drive and impetus for solidarity is connected to the very core of what Jesus’ death and resurrection exemplify.²²⁰

In “Jesus Christ and the Movement for Social Justice”, Barth clarifies this: “[f]or Jesus there was only a social God, a God of solidarity; therefore there was only a social religion, a religion of solidarity”.²²¹ It is Barth’s concept of solidarity which Robert E. Hood believes directs “the ethically responsible Christian engaged in political praxis to the non-Christian in the world”.²²²

God’s sovereignty “encompasses the world and all its dimensions, including both nature and politics”.²²³ Barth does not attempt to prove the object of this world’s faith, but rather clarifies the necessity of this understanding for life and existence: “Theology is neither a storming of the gates of heaven nor a *sacrificium intellectum*. It does not seek to establish the ‘general possibility’ of the object, nor does it require a surrender of reason. It starts from an actuality and arrives at an understanding of its rational necessity.”²²⁴ Here, Hunsinger believes Barth develops a theological pragmatics whereby theology enters into political activity as if its

²¹⁸ Robert E. Hood, *Contemporary Political Orders and Christ: Karl Barth’s Christology and Political Praxis* (Allison Park: Pickwick Publications, 1985), xiv, referencing CD II/2, 653-7.

²¹⁹ CD IV/3, 493-4.

²²⁰ Stanley, “From Habermas to Barth and Back Again”, 119-120.

²²¹ Karl Barth, “Jesus Christ and the Movement for Social Justice”, in *Karl Barth and Radical Politics*, ed. George Hunsinger (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 34.

²²² Hood, *Contemporary Political Orders and Christ: Karl Barth’s Christology and Political Praxis*, xiv-xv.

²²³ Hunsinger, “Toward a Radical Barth”, 188.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 221

analogy of faith is completely realistic²²⁵ – as if Jesus and Christian communal practices are paradigms for civic as well as ecclesial action.

But is Barth's method of analogy realistic in a political and civic context? Will Herberg believes not, describing Barth's method as "arbitrary", "unconvincing", and "pretty much out of line" with the rest of his "theological work".²²⁶ He suggests that Barth constructed his theological scheme upon a prior conception of the ideal state; he "adjust[ed] his 'Christological' arguments to conclusions *already* reached *on other grounds*".²²⁷ Barth's commitment to the Swiss democratic system is an evident example of this, according to Herberg's critique.²²⁸ Emil Brunner goes further:

. . . in the embarrassment which ensues when he tries to move from Christology to concrete norms for the State, he seizes a new principle, by the aid of which he hopes to fill up the awkward gap, the principle of – analogy! *Per analogiam*, Barth now derives norms from the Christian Church for the civil community, but he evidently does not notice that anything and everything can be derived from the same principle of analogy: a monarchy just as much as a republic (Christ the King), the totalitarian State, just as much as a state with civil liberties (Christ the Lord of all; man a servant, indeed a slave of Jesus Christ).²²⁹

To Barth's assertion that his analogies illustrate the teleological direction of the Church's public involvement, Werpehowski responds:

the route is finally not plotted successfully. . . . [T]he analogies are simply indeterminate regarding very different political arrangements. By themselves they could be employed to support any number of disparate strategies and arrangements – libertarian, liberal, socialist – because the crucial categories of "equality," "freedom," and "duties of social responsibility" are not integrated with respect to one another in

²²⁵ Ibid., 188.

²²⁶ Will Herberg, "The Social Philosophy of Karl Barth" in *Community, State and Church*, trans. G. Ronald Howe (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1960), 35, 36.

²²⁷ Ibid., 35.

²²⁸ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, "Church Members First, Citizens Second", *Christianity Today*, 30.8 (1986), 29. But as has already been discussed, Barth while noting the tendency of Christian political direction toward democracy, does not preclude other political forms. See for instance Barth, "The Christian Community and the Civil Community", 161.

²²⁹ Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*, trans. Olive Wyon, vol. 2 (London: Lutterworth Press, 1952), 319.

terms of some concrete vision of the ends of political life in their relation to the human beings who would flourish within it as citizens.²³⁰

Werpehowski concludes by saying that “the great failure of Barth’s political ethics is that this application is never accomplished with clarity or rigor”.²³¹ Willis recognizes this difficulty and highlights one occasion in which Barth comes perilously close to suggesting an analogical justification for totalitarianism:

God above all things! Sovereign even over the legalistic totalitarianism of your state! You fear it? Fear it not! The limits of that system where its representatives must halt or else be destroyed is set not by its totalitarianism, but by its legalism which makes the state totalitarian in an ungodly and inhuman way. “Totalitarian” also, in a way, is the grace of the gospel which we all are to proclaim, free grace, truly divine and truly human, claiming every man wholly for itself. To a degree the Communist state might be interpreted and understood as an image of grace - to be sure, a grossly distorted and darkened image. Indeed, grace is all-embracing, *totalitarian*.²³²

In view of the guidelines Barth derived for the just state in “The Christian Community and the Civil Community”, which led clearly in the direction of constitutional democracy, Barth implies at this point that there might be such a thing as a *godly* and *human* totalitarianism. Willis believes that though Barth argues that “practical reason [should be] given more of a place in special ethics, its relationship to the command remains elusive”.²³³

It would appear that Barth’s rational procedures for making sense of political analogues are unsatisfactory. As Stanley states: “Barth relates all people as common under God’s rule, but the ecclesial community is the only one that seems to recognize this”.²³⁴ Willis notes:

²³⁰ Werpehowski, “Justification and Justice in the Theology of Karl Barth”, 631.

²³¹ Ibid., 632.

²³² Willis citing Barth, *How to Serve God in a Marxist Land*, trans. Thomas Wieser (New York: Association Press, 1959), 58. See Willis, *The Ethics of Karl Barth*, 402.

²³³ Willis, *The Ethics of Karl Barth*, 426.

²³⁴ Stanley, “From Habermas to Barth and Back Again”, 122.

Until this is clarified, both the place of rational deliberation in ethics, and the line of continuity, within a particular ethical situation, between Christians and non-Christians, will remain dubious.²³⁵

An application of Barth's model of the just state for the purpose of inter-religious encounter

Hunsinger, believing that there has never been a "theologian either before or since who has so firmly grasped not only the complexity but also the simplicity of the task"²³⁶ at hand, cautions against any over-hasty assumptions about Barth's model of the just state and in particular his essay "The Christian Community and the Civil Community":

It is important to recognise, as the critics of this essay have not always recognized, the self-imposed limitations under which Barth was operating. He was simply experimenting in what he believed to be the church's proper use of political reason. His experiment was meant to provide examples of a rational or analogical process by which the church could move from theological reflection to political application. What he wanted to establish . . . was the "possibility and necessity of comparisons and analogies" between the spiritual and the political spheres. His examples of this analogical transition were meant to be suggestive rather than definitive.²³⁷

In tandem with this, Willis states:

None of the guidelines that Barth sets forth can legitimately be taken as more than that – they are not unyielding principles or rules to be applied automatically to the political situation. If they indicate a direction, they do not supply the Church with an ideology of the "just" State.²³⁸

In concert with both Hunsinger and Willis on this point, it is correct to believe that what these analogies actually do is give a "*sense* of the direction in which Christian political decisions will move".²³⁹ They suggest "roughly the

²³⁵ Willis, *The Ethics of Karl Barth*, 427

²³⁶ Hunsinger, "Karl Barth and Radical Politics: Some further considerations", 183-4.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 180.

²³⁸ Willis, *The Ethics of Karl Barth*, 403.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

contours of a political order in which the importance of justice is both recognised and given provisional exemplification".²⁴⁰

An example of how Barth sees Christians going about the business of making political (and hence theological and ethical) decisions that is highly significant for inter-religious encounter today, is in a monograph he wrote in 1952, "Political Decisions in the Unity of Faith".²⁴¹ The discussion unfolds against the specific question of "political responsibility" posed by the remilitarization of Germany and its inclusion within NATO at the beginning of the Cold War.²⁴² Evangelical Christians in Germany were divided on this issue. This provides the model for saying something generally about the nature of Christian political (and hence theological and ethical) decisions.

Barth argues that political responsibility is made real *contextually* by the action of individuals, not in official Church pronouncements. He writes:

If the political mission of the Church is to be turned to practical account at all and in good time, it can only take the form of comments and declarations by individual members of the Church, made in the freedom and commitment of their personal responsibility as Christians.²⁴³

However the individual Christian does not act in isolation from the Church. Her action will always constitute "a call and a summons *in* the Church *to* the Church – as an invitation to all the members of the Church . . . first of all to realise that neutrality is out of the question, that it is a matter of obedience and disobedience . . . [and secondly] as an invitation 'to prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God' ".²⁴⁴ This is a "risky undertaking",²⁴⁵ as it will inevitably provoke "groans and criticisms".²⁴⁶ It could cause tension and threaten the unity of

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Karl Barth, "Political Decisions in the Unity of the Faith", in *Against the Stream: Shorter Post-War Writings 1946-1952*, trans. R.G. Smith and S. Goodman (London: SCM, 1949), 149-164.

²⁴² Ibid., 150.

²⁴³ Ibid., 151.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 157.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 156.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 157.

the Church,²⁴⁷ because this will be an action grounded in the immediate response of faith and obedience that the individual finds unavoidably required of her at a given point. The action of the individual Christian must therefore proceed without regard to the issue of unanimity, for it will represent her particular judgment about a situation in which she is called upon “to choose between life and death, God and idols”.²⁴⁸ This does not mean that she has no concern for the Church – indeed, it is precisely because of her concern that she must proceed in her decision and action:

The unity of the faith can maintain its spiritual truth and reality only by constant renewal. It can and will be renewed only if Christians do not try to avoid crises in their fellowship with one another, but are determined, whatever the outcome, to see them through. . . . [I]n practice the Church can only choose between using its political responsibility and thereby exposing itself to the risk of crises, and sparing itself the crises and thus failing to do justice to its political mission.²⁴⁹

Other Christians should see this therefore as an opportunity to examine their own faith.²⁵⁰ This is because: “[n]o one can believe in another’s place or allow anyone else to do [her] believing for [her]. Therefore no choice made in obedience to the faith can be taken over unexamined by anyone else and turned into [her] own choice and decision.”²⁵¹ No one should consider themselves exempt from this process; no one should consider themselves exempt from “listening in all freedom but with a humble and open heart and mind to the testimony of a fellow-Christian”.²⁵²

As they are addressed to the Church, the political decisions of individual Christians will manifest the openness and joy, but also the resoluteness, indicative of the freedom in which they (and all humanity) stand. They will “demand from those who make them and commend them to others an extreme degree of political sobriety

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 155.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 154. For emphasis of this point see 156 n. 1: “If in 1934 we had had to wait for the unanimity of all the groups and circles in the Church which were not even adherents of the ‘German Christian’ school – or even merely for the understanding and agreement of the wise men of Erlangen and Tuebingen, etc., either nothing at all would have been said in Barmen or only a lot of vague mumbling”.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 159.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 158.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid.

and theological insight”.²⁵³ Effective decisions and actions, those that manifest clear overtones of authority and truth, will always be marked by “a good deal of common sense and a spark of prophecy . . . something of the all-seeing love of Christ”.²⁵⁴

In one respect, the political decisions of Christians will resemble those of their non-Christian neighbours. They will always be grounded in a careful assessment of alternatives, and in a consideration of the arguments for and against the particular issue at hand. Thus, they will demand the full employment of the powers of rational deliberation at one’s command.²⁵⁵ The point of difference between Christian and non-Christian political decisions is that the former take place

not in a space apart from his Christian faith, but before God – and not before any god, but before the God who speaks to the world, to the Christian community and therefore to the individual Christian, in the gospel of Jesus Christ.²⁵⁶

In her political decisions, then, the Christian “will look for a decision which is not arbitrary or just clever in a human sense, but which is made in the freedom of obedience to God’s command”.²⁵⁷ These decisions are placed on “the extremely narrow frontier that divides the world from the Kingdom of God”, and must aim at hitting the precise point “where common sense speaks the language of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit the language of common sense”.²⁵⁸

In the end, there can be no guarantee of a favourable reception by the Christian community at large of what the promptings of common sense and the Holy Spirit suggest to the individual to be the best (indeed, the required) course of action. But political decisions will always entail the willingness to take a confessional stance, “and to summon other Christians (and non-Christians!) at all costs to take the same decision (since God, known or unknown, is the God of them all)”.²⁵⁹

²⁵³ Ibid., 159.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 152.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 160.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 154. An ethical framework linking Christians to non-Christians is clearly indicated here. The necessity for taking a position, ethically, and summoning others to that position, is also expressed in Barth’s doctrine of creation. Cf. *CD* III/4, 8-9.

The mutual dependence of Christians and non-Christians upon God in this 1952 monograph parallels the mutual dependency argued for in Chapter 2 between Christians, Jews and Muslims. In this understanding, there is no reason to suggest that Barth's term "non-Christians" should not be interpreted to include Jews and Muslims. Within Barth's paradigm then, Christians, Jews and Muslims are able to make similar political decisions, albeit for different reasons.

As a parallel argument to "Creation and its lights", Barth's model of the just state (as a parable of the Kingdom of God) promotes an understanding of democratic society which respects freedom and difference. It represents the desire for a political community "which transcends racial, national, economic, and ideological interests"²⁶⁰ in the quest for justice for all citizens. As Biggar suggests, "it represents the hope for a European order . . . in which the rights and liberties of its constitutive peoples [including Jews and Muslims] are guaranteed".²⁶¹ This is because "each constitutive group and each of its members is assured of the freedom to live and grow and act, provided that they respect and co-operate with other such groups – whether linguistic, regional, social, or confessional – and their members."²⁶² In this understanding then, Christians, Jews and Muslims are not only able to make similar political decisions, they should also be able to co-operate with each other and make common cause with each other for the betterment of society.

Conclusion

As Chapter 3 has shown, for Barth there is genuine witness to God *extra muros ecclesiae* in the form of secular words or parables. Chapter 4 has argued that the little lights of creation can also become truth *extra muros ecclesiae* for the Church. As a parallel argument to the lights of creation, the just state is a parable (analogy) of the Kingdom. In the quest for justice, then, Barth believes that a political decision made by a Christian (which should always be understood theologically and ethically) is not necessarily dissimilar to one made by a non-Christian in society. This decision making process is completely viable in an *ad hoc* and ephemeral way. Both can point to Christ. Chapter 3 has argued that genuine witness to God *extra muros*

²⁶⁰ Nigel Biggar, *The Hastening That Awaits: Karl Barth's Ethics*, 168.

²⁶¹ Ibid., see also Barth, "Im Namen", 209-210.

²⁶² Ibid.

ecclesiae in the form of secular words or parables should also include the genuine witness of the other Abrahamic religions. This chapter has argued that the Church, from Barth's perspective, can also make common cause with those from the other Abrahamic faiths in the desire for a just society. Inter-religious encounter can therefore occur, from Barth's perspective, within the public arena of democratic society.

Chapter 5 will argue that Barth's theology is relevant for "our current social scene"²⁶³ in Britain and Europe today. His work gives a vision for Western democratic, secular and pluralist society in which theological beliefs can be translated into political activity which serves as analogies, parables of the Kingdom of God.

Thus Green is right to surmise that:

. . . one Lord of all translates into a state where all citizens have equal freedom and responsibility; not arbitrarily restricting people because of their religion, class, race or . . . sex.²⁶⁴

This vision is particularly relevant to contemporary British and European Christian communities and their relations to their Muslim fellow citizens.

²⁶³ David A. S. Fergusson, "Theology in a Time of War: John Baillie's Political Writings", in *God's Will in a Time of Crisis*, ed. Andrew Morton (Edinburgh: The Centre for Theology and Public Issues, 1994), 44.

²⁶⁴ Clifford J. Green, "Public Theology and Political Ethics: The Christian Community and the Civil Community", in *Karl Barth: Theologian of Freedom*, ed. Clifford J. Green (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 265.

CHAPTER 5

Bringing Barth's theology to Islam in the contemporary European context

Introduction

Near the end of Barth's life he mentioned a desire to devote himself to the history of world religions. Integral to this history would be the relation between Judaism and Islam. Chapter 5 will argue that the foundation of Barth's planned inter-religious enterprise would have been found within his understanding of God's Covenant with Israel and its fulfilment in Jesus Christ. Chapter 5 will argue that the ontological unity of Christianity and Israel, which Barth argues for, should be interpreted to include Islam. Any inter-religious encounter among the Abrahamic faiths should be fundamentally ethical in nature – demonstrating a responsibility to struggle for justice, both individually and corporately, before God.

As Chapter 4 has shown, a case can be made for promoting democratic society which respects freedom and difference on the grounds of Barth's theology. Chapter 5 will argue that Barth's understanding of democratic society can accommodate religious pluralism where members of the Abrahamic faiths can strive together for justice and the common good of all. This is of particular importance to Muslim communities as they struggle for acceptance and recognition in European societies. Barth's work provides an understanding of truth claims which offers unexpected potential for inter-religious encounter and co-operation with Muslims. This potential can be explicated through Geoff Thompson's interpretation of John Cobb's understanding of pluralism, which provides a framework for such encounter and co-operation. Hence, in this understanding, Muslims can contribute to a just society and interact with the Church in ways which are theologically fruitful for the Church's own life.

Bringing Barth's theology to the contemporary context

For Barth, the state exists as "a means of getting things done".¹ Its purpose is "to contribute to the new creation, the reconciled and reconciling humanity willed and chosen by God in God's decision to be humanity's God in Christ".² It fulfils this

¹ Rowan Williams, "Barth, War and the State", in *Reckoning with Barth: Essays in Commemoration of the Centenary of Karl Barth's Birth*, ed. Nigel Biggar (Oxford: Mowbray, 1988), 187.

² Ibid.

purpose by “resisting disorder, restraining, by compulsion where necessary, the mutual destructiveness of sinful human beings, creating equity”, harmony and justice.³ The Church announces to the state the good news that “it has a right to exist because God is God, and is God as Jesus Christ”, and that therefore the state has a legitimate task of service to perform to Jesus Christ.⁴

But, while Fergusson affirms a distinctive Christian ethical witness such as Barth’s which is based on the Lordship of Jesus Christ, he is also right to recognise that this is problematic in democratic societies which “attach a high premium to values of tolerance and pluralism”.⁵ Whilst “faithfulness must take priority over considerations about effectiveness . . . this must happen without isolation in an ecclesiastical enclave”.⁶ Hunsinger encapsulates this tension when he suggests:

The Church does not confront the world in absolute antithesis and mutual exclusion (sectarianism), nor does it simply surrender itself to the world’s agenda, as if it were merely a valuable resource for the accomplishment of secular ends (acculturation). The Church’s solidarity with the world allows it to seek valid forms of contextualization while guarding against flaccid conformism. Yet its precedence over the world requires it to maintain its essential distinctiveness without retreating into rigid isolation.”⁷

Hence, while Barth’s writings certainly provide a model for a just, peaceable and democratic Europe, what needs to be recognised in any attempt to bring Barth’s theology into the contemporary context is the fact that European democracies today are more secular and pluralistic than those of Barth’s time. Switzerland, for instance, used by Barth as an exemplar of the just state, though “[t]raditionally a multicultural society”, had until the 1970’s fewer than 20,000 Muslims living within its borders.⁸ But Islam is now more visible, established, and vocal in Switzerland and the West

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Fergusson, *Community, Liberalism and Christian Ethics*, 33.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ George Hunsinger, “To Yoder: Hoping without a Recipe”, in *Barmen and the Confessing Church Today*, ed. James Y. Holloway (Lampeter, Edwin Mellen Press, 1995), 292, as cited by David Fergusson, *Community, Liberalism and Christian Ethics*, 33.

⁸ Hans Mahnig, “Islam in Switzerland: Fragmented Accommodation in a Federal Country”, in *Muslims in the West: from Sojourners to Citizens*, ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 72, 73.

than ever before. In fact Jane I. Smith states that it “is now second in number to adherents only to Christianity in almost every western country”.⁹ An added factor in Islam’s presence in Europe is that “since 9/11, a great deal of theological effort has rightly gone into the delicate work of Christian-Muslim reconciliation” as the single biggest theological issue of today.¹⁰

Hence the question is posed: if Barth were alive today, what role would he play as “the greatest Protestant theologian since Luther” in assisting, or “in the view of his critics hindering”, the reconciliation between Christians and Muslims?¹¹

It is well documented that Barth corresponded and conversed with Christians and others on many current theological, social and political issues throughout his life.¹² As Hunsinger states:

In his early ministry he [Barth] was known as the “red pastor” for his labour-organizing efforts to improve wages and working conditions among local industrial workers. Then, in opposition to his teachers’ support for the “pre-emptive” German aggression against Belgium that helped to spark World War 1, he broke with modern academic theology. In midcareer, as the principal author of the Barmen Declaration, he became the intellectual leader of the evangelical resistance to Hitler. During the cold war he emerged as an outspoken critic of anticommunism, urging the church to a neutralist stance “between East and West”. Having backed military action against the Nazis at a time of indecision, he later opposed postwar German rearmament and the deployment of nuclear weapons in Europe. During his final years he was increasingly anti-imperialist, antimilitarist, and antinuclear, as the pacifist tendencies of his early career resurfaced.¹³

Lindsay also makes the salient point that Barth had

⁹ Jane I. Smith, “Introduction”, *Muslims in the West: from Sojourners to Citizens*, 3.

¹⁰ Lindsay, *Barth, Israel and Jesus: Karl Barth’s Theology of Israel*, ix.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² See for example Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976)

¹³ Hunsinger, “Introduction”, *For The Sake of The World: Karl Barth and The Future of Ecclesial Theology*, 7-8. For more comprehensive surveys of Barth’s political activity see Deschner, “Karl Barth as Political Activist”, 55-66; Gorringe, *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony*; Green, ‘Introduction’ in *Karl Barth: Theologian of Freedom*, 11-45; Jehle, *Ever Against the Stream: The Politics of Karl Barth, 1906-1968*.

... significant relationships with individual Jews through whom he also became acquainted with contemporary Jewish thought. If, in the early 1920s, he kept these acquaintances at a respectable scholarly distance, the Nazi years- particularly as the persecution of the Jews intensified to genocidal proportions – saw him adopt a far more positive perspective, from which he was able to stand in both theological and humanitarian solidarity with the persecuted kinfolk of Jesus. In the words of Rabbi Geis, “Who, other than Karl Barth, could have demonstrated more clearly the struggle and courageous resistance that develops from grace?”¹⁴

Surprisingly, Barth also began to show an interest in world religions near the end of his life.¹⁵ Werner Kohler states that in the summer of 1964 Barth expressed to him his regret that he (Barth)

could not reach his goal to study the non-Christian religions. His intention was to write his Church Dogmatic in order to start after completing Vol. V with a *confrontation* [italics mine] with the non-Christian religions.¹⁶

In particular, Barth expressed an interest in Islam. After the 1967 war between Israel and five Arab nations – the so-called the Six Day War – Barth expressed publicly his remarkable yet controversial position in support of the state of Israel.¹⁷ Reflecting on Israel’s victory, Barth understood it as God’s faithfulness to

¹⁴ Lindsay, *Barth, Israel and Jesus: Karl Barth’s Theology of Israel*, 35. Though Barth never travelled to Asia, Hoekema contends that Barth’s theology was of interest to many Asian and especially Japanese theologians: “[N]ot only the issue of religion as unbelief draws attention, but also Barth’s digression about the Jodo Shin Shu school within Buddhism; motives from the Zen-Buddhism; a comparison of *das Nichtige* (Nothingness) in his Church Dogmatics with Nothingness in Buddhism; religious pluralism; socio-political issues like the question of guilt of the Japanese churches; eschatology; and finally humanizing as a central concept within both Barth’s anthropology and Confucianism” (see Alle Hoekema, “Barth and Asia : ‘No Boring Theology’ ”, 129).

¹⁵ In a conversation the author had with Dr. Robin Boyd on 3rd October 2007, Boyd commented that he believed that Barth began to show an interest in world religions because his son Christoph had, up until the mid 1960’s, been teaching in Indonesia.

¹⁶ Werner Kohler, “Toward a theology of Religions”, *Japanese Religions*, 4 (1996), 13.

¹⁷ Marquardt writes: “ ‘The Jewish-Christian Solidarity’ of that period must be understood by those here to call unconditionally for ‘Jewish-Christian Solidarity’ today! That must be expressly stated because recently a group of otherwise respectable Christians – I mean the Working Committee of the ‘Prague Christian Peace Conference’ held on July 3, 1967 in Sagorsk . . . has sent out into the world a Pronouncement of the East-West Crisis of which I can only say that I actually missed any deep theological meaning as well as any practical-political reason in its negative position on the struggle for the existence (*Daseinskampf*) of the state of Israel. . . . The good direction taken in those days must today be held to be theologically and politically; it must not be broken off again today under any pretext . . . ” (Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt, “Christentum und Zionismus”, *Evangelische Theologie*, 28 (1968), 654 as translated and cited by Sonderegger, *That Jesus Christ was born a Jew*, 136-7).

his promise for Israel rather than as an analogy to the conquest of Canaan under Joshua.¹⁸ However, he was not blind to the political reality in Palestine. His concern about Islam is evidenced in his dialogue with J. Bouman from Lebanon. In a letter to H. Berkhof in Leiden (1968), Barth reports on his conversation with J. Bouman: "In the theological appreciation of situation there [in Lebanon] . . . we were . . . completely in agreement" that "a new communication about the relation between Bible and Koran is an urgent task for us".¹⁹ In the letter Barth expresses the belief that his dream of developing a "theology of the Holy Spirit" was a dream which he could "only envisage from afar, as Moses once looked on the promised land".²⁰ Busch suggests that Barth "was thinking of a theology which, unlike his own, was not written from the dominant perspective of christology, but from that of pneumatology, and in which the concerns of the theology of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were not so much repeated and continued as understood and developed further."²¹

Another glimpse of Barth's increasing awareness of both rabbinic Judaism and Islam comes in his book *Ad Limina Apostolorum* (1967). Here Barth devotes himself to serious study of the sixteen Latin texts of Vatican II, especially those concerning Israel and non-Christian religions. For Barth "later and contemporary Judaism (believing or unbelieving)" is the sole natural proof of God.²² Instead of regarding Jews as separated brethren to Christians, Barth posits: "Would it not be more appropriate, in view of the anti-Semitism of the ancient, the medieval, and to a large degree the modern church, to set forth an explicit confession of guilt here, rather than in respect to the separated brethren?"²³ Such confession would also be appropriate, in Barth's view, with regard to Islam, because of the deplorable role of the Church in the "so-called Crusades".²⁴

¹⁸ Cf. Stephen R. Haynes, *Prospects for Post-Holocaust Theology* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 81.

¹⁹ Karl Barth, *Gesamtausgabe: Briefe 1961-1968*, ed J. Fangmeier and H. Stoevesandt (Zürich: TVZ, 1975), 504-5, as translated by Chung, "Karl Barth's Theology of Israel: An Impasse in Jewish-Christian Relations".

²⁰ Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, 494.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Karl Barth, *Ad Limina Apostolorum*, trans. Keith R. Crim (Edinburgh: St. Andrews Press, 1969), 36.

²³ Ibid., 36-7.

²⁴ Ibid., 37.

Chung states that Markus Barth reported that his father Karl Barth had a plan on devoting himself to the history of world religions.²⁵ The following relative plan was crucial: a relation between Christendom and Judaism, a relation between Judaism and Islam, and finally a relation between Buddhism and Hinduism.²⁶ Of particular interest to this thesis is the proposed relation between Judaism and Islam.²⁷ It is plausible to believe that the foundation of Barth's inter-religious plan would have been found in his understanding of God's Covenant with Israel and its fulfilment in Jesus Christ.

For Barth the innermost mystery of the existence of the Jews is their election from among all people by God to be joined with God in this covenantal relationship. The "whole Bible bears witness"²⁸ to the history of this covenant: "It is with freely

²⁵ Chung, "Karl Barth's Theology of Israel: An Impasse in Jewish-Christian Relations". Barth's intent is also supported by Jürgen Fangmeier: "Als ich im September 1968 das letzte Mal bei Karl Barth sein konnte, sprach er davon, womit er sich beschäftigen würde, wenn er noch Jahre theologischen Schaffens vor sich hätte. Und er nannte nach dem römischen Katholizismus die Ostkirchen und dann die nichtchristlichen Religionen; aber, fügte er hinzu, ganz anders, als man in der Regel darangehe: nicht so, daß das Allgemeine die Basis sei, auf der sich dann vielleicht Jesus Christus als der Gipfel höchster erheben soll, sondern so, daß Jesus Christus der Grund sei, von dem her mit den Religionen vielleicht ein noch ganz neues Gespräch zu eröffnen wäre" (Jürgen Fangmeier, *Der Theologe Karl Barth* (Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt Verlag, 1969), 62).

²⁶ See Bertold Klappert, *Versöhnung und Befreiung: Versuche, Karl Barth kontextuell zu verstehen* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1994), 48. Compare this sequence with Luther's view of the similarities between Jewish and Muslim ceremonies: "The Jew can agree more readily with the Turk than with the Christian. The Jew and the Turk agree on the truth of God; neither believes the Trinity or Baptism. Both agree on circumcision and on other external ceremonies." (Quotation cited by Rajashekar, "Luther and Islam: An Asian Perspective", 177). Luther also saw Islamic doctrines and practices as "a patchwork of Jewish, Christian, and heathen beliefs. He [Mohammed] gets his praise of Christ, Mary, the apostles, and other saints from the Christians. From the Jews he gets abstinence from wine and fasting at certain times of the year, washing like the Nazarites (Num. 6: 1-2) and eating off the ground. And the Turks perform the same holy works as some of our monks and hope for everlasting life at the Judgment Day, for, holy people that they are, they believe in the resurrection of the dead, though few of the papists believe it" (ibid.).

²⁷ A similar plan to Barth's plan of investigating the relations between Christianity and Judaism, then between Judaism and Islam, and finally between Buddhism and Hinduism is described by Klaus Berger in an article entitled "Gentiles, Gentile Christianity". Berger describes a concentric circle model where some religions and worldviews are considered especially close, such as Islam's relation to Judaism which in turn is "hardly inseparable from Christianity". In this model these religions form an "inner ring" as they have many things in common. Buddhism and Hinduism are considered "a little more distant". "Finally others are more remote and can gain most from Christianity's innovative power." Of particular interest is Berger's contention that "all definitions of the relation to other religions should reflect the fact that the hands of Christians are tied to some extent by the fact that they have been incorporated into the history of the Jewish people of God. Hence they also must always take into account the relation of Israel to other religions" (see Klaus Berger, "Gentiles, Gentile Christianity", in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, Vol 2., E-I, trans and ed. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 384).

²⁸ CD IV/1, 56.

electing love that according to the witness of the Old Testament Yahweh concluded His covenant with Israel.”²⁹ Election means “not that Israel has chosen Him but He Israel.”³⁰ In God’s election, Israel has no advantage over other nations: “Yahweh is not just the national God of Israel, but the sovereign Lord of all peoples and their history”.³¹ Israel’s own electing can consist only of acknowledging after the fact the covenant that has been made – or not doing so. The covenant is two-sided to the extent that – regardless if Israel were worthy of it, or how Israel relates to it – its connectedness with God is enclosed in God’s connectedness with it. The covenant is “the historical reality with which the Old Testament is concerned whether it actually uses the word or not”.³² It rests on the divine pronouncement: “‘I will be your God, and ye shall be my people’ (Jer. 7:23; 11:4; 30:22; 31:33; 32:38; Ezek. 36:28).”³³ “Just as there is no God but the God of the covenant, there is no man but the man of the covenant”.³⁴ In this pronouncement God has pledged Godself to this people – God has firstly *bound* Godself. In this promise God has also bound *this people* to Godself, making it the partner in God’s covenant, the people *of* God.

God is faithful to this promise and no human unfaithfulness can dissolve the covenant. Hence the covenant is a lasting one. “God does not cease to be the . . . covenant-partner” of humanity.³⁵ Thus “man . . . does not cease to be the creature and covenant-partner of God. . . . As he has not instituted the covenant, he cannot destroy it or even contract out of it as though it were a free compact.”³⁶ For Barth the promise of a new covenant in Jeremiah 31 cannot mean the replacement of the old covenant with Israel by a different one. It has to mean the “revelation and confirmation of what He had always willed and indeed done in the covenant with Israel.”³⁷ The promise, however, does aim at a “complete change in the form of the covenant which is to take place in the last days and therefore beyond the history of

²⁹ CD IV/2, 768.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² CD IV/1, 22.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 43.

³⁵ CD IV/2, 484.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ CD IV/1, 34.

Israel considered in the Old Testament.”³⁸ Then it will be so “filled” with grace that the “covenant with Israel is made and avails for the whole race.”³⁹

For Barth then, there is in Christ there no new or different covenant made with the nations. Busch contends that “this is Barth’s basic thesis. *This* is the issue for him, and not that the covenant with Israel is *replaced* by a different one.”⁴⁰ Barth writes:

There is no question of repeating the covenant. For Peter, for John, for Paul, for the churches in Corinth and Rome, it was concluded in Christ. It was quite unthinkable that it should have to or could be concluded anew with Peter or John or Paul or the Corinthians or Romans. There can be no question of anything but their inclusion in the one covenant.⁴¹

Through Christ the covenant has now become a truly “perfect covenant”, perfect in that it is now God’s covenant not only with Israel but with humanity in general.⁴² The fact that the “world” is now reconciled to God means that, through this “perfect covenant”, “as an act of God . . . the men of all times and places. . . [have] their situation . . . objectively [and] decisively changed, whether they are aware of it or not”.⁴³

In the incarnation humanity is “encountered by the One who is no other than the ‘covenant God’ who bound himself to Israel, but now his definition as the covenant God has become *definitive*, in that it is made precise in a *deepened*

³⁸ Ibid., 33.

³⁹ Ibid., 35.

⁴⁰ Eberherd Busch, *The Great Passion: an Introduction to Karl Barth’s Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 99.

⁴¹ CD I/2, 105. For Barth, the name Jesus Christ opens the door into the world where: “the spaciousness of the world leads out from the narrowness of Israel” (Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, 73). Under this name “God Himself realised . . . the self- giving of Himself as the Covenant-partner of the people determined by Him from and to all eternity” (CD II/2, 53). God *assumes* human form; not just the form of any man. God assumes into nature with Godself and God’s being, Jesus of Nazareth, “this one man as opposed to all other men” (CD IV/2, 48). In this one man, humanity as a whole is *assumed* and *accepted* by God, and hence, accepts God. Jesus Christ is therefore the fulfilment of the covenant between God and Israel (Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, 76, 78).

⁴² CD IV/1, 33. The general, universal truth which embraces all humanity is that the God of the whole world is, by way of particularity, the “God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob”. See Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, 74.

⁴³ Ibid., 245.

sense”.⁴⁴ That deepened sense is Jesus Christ: “the Messiah of Israel . . . the Saviour of the world”.⁴⁵

That God has in fact accepted humanity in Jesus Christ is attested in the world by the visible “community” of those accepted by God who are gathered together by and through him in order to bear witness to the world that they belong to him. “[T]o say ‘Christ’ is to say ‘Christ and His own’ – Christ in and with his fullness, which is His community. As His community (His body), this cannot be merely a passive object” of all that God does to it within his covenant and its fulfilment.⁴⁶ Barth writes:

the people of Israel in its whole history *ante et post Christum* and the Christian Church as it came into being on the day of Pentecost are two forms and aspects . . . of the one inseparable community in which Jesus Christ has his earthly-historical form of existence, by which he is attested to the whole world, by which the whole world is summoned to faith in Him. For what the Christian Church is, Israel was and is before it – His possession (Jn. 1:11), His body. . . . We are dealing with two forms, two aspects, two ‘economies’ of grace. But it is the one history . . . having its centre in Jesus Christ It is the bow of the one covenant which stretches over the whole. . . . To try to deny this unity would be to deny Jesus Christ Himself.⁴⁷

The Church that confesses Jesus Christ would deny Him and make its witness “pointless” if it did not confess its unity with all Israel and instead saw itself in detachment from Israel.⁴⁸ “For what does the Church have which the Synagogue does not also have, and long before it (Rom. 9:4-5) – especially Jesus Christ Himself, who is of the Jews, who is the Jewish Messiah, and only as such the Lord of the Church?”⁴⁹ For Barth the Church is the historical environment of Jesus because

⁴⁴ Busch, *The Great Passion: an Introduction to Karl Barth's Theology*, 101.

⁴⁵ CD IV/2, 260. See also Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, 76.

⁴⁶ CD IV/2, 634.

⁴⁷ CD IV/1, 669-71. Busch contends that at this point Barth opposes Schleiermacher's influential thesis that *biblical* Judaism and Christianity are two different religions. Busch argues that Schleiermacher's thesis is countered by the fact that Israel should be seen as the natural environment of Jesus, because he “is – primarily and supremely – theirs”, because he elected “flesh and blood from Judah-Israel to be His tabernacle”, and thus their election is confirmed. Israel is gathered from both Jews and Gentiles (CD II/2, 210-11). See Busch, *The Great Passion: an Introduction to Karl Barth's Theology*, 255.

⁴⁸ CD II/2, 213-33, 267.

⁴⁹ CD IV/1, 671.

people are called into it: “[t]he Gentile Christian community of every age and land is a guest in the house of Israel. It assumes the election and calling of Israel. It lives in fellowship with the King of Israel.”⁵⁰ In all their distinctiveness, Israel and the Church are the one community of God. They are both, in their distinctiveness, witnesses of God to one another and together to the rest of the world.

In its election to be the people of God, which initially excluded the Gentiles, Israel bears witness to the “judgment of God”, namely, to God’s judgment on “natural theology” with its assertion that there is in all of humanity an inherent preparedness for God – this denies the grace of God. The existence of Israel shows that the covenant rests only upon God’s gracious self-determination for fellowship, upon God’s readiness to turn aside and take upon Godself God’s No to the unworthiness and anti-grace hostility of the covenant-breaking partner. The Church, however, bears witness to the “mercy of God”, namely, to the mercy with which God called into the community of God those who were originally excluded from God’s election.⁵¹ The existence of the Church shows that all its sin and remoteness from the covenant cannot prevent God from receiving humanity and honouring it with God’s fellowship with it, so that humanity has no other option on its part than to accept God. Busch writes: “What makes Israel and the church into *one* community and *unites* their two witnesses is precisely what Israel outside the church cannot perceive in its no to Christ: *Jesus Christ*.”⁵² Through Christ’s reconciliation the dispute between Israel and the Church is now a “settled dispute” in the eyes of God.⁵³

The fact is that Israel and the Church need each other. But not only do they need each other, they are in union with one another, “a unity which does not have to be established but is already there ontologically” because of their common foundation in grace.⁵⁴ For Barth a relationship between Christianity and Judaism exists ontologically. “Moreover”, as Lindsay argues, “this unity is not merely a relic of the biblical age, but remains in force; the Jews . . . remain loved and elect by God

⁵⁰ CD IV/3, 877.

⁵¹ CD II/2, 205-33.

⁵² Busch, *The Great Passion: an Introduction to Karl Barth’s Theology*, 255.

⁵³ CD II/2, 208.

⁵⁴ CD IV/1, 671.

right up to the present day, irrespective of their attitude to Jesus.”⁵⁵ Lindsay continues: “If Judaism needs the witness of the Church, so too the Church needs the witness of the Synagogue as the indispensable root from which it has sprung and in which it must remain if it is to be complete.”⁵⁶ But more than this: rabbinic Judaism “testifies to divine grace in ways that are positive, salutary and capable of contributing constructively to the theological and ethical self-understanding of the church”.⁵⁷

As has been argued in Chapter 2, Islam should also be addressed on its own terms and not as a derivation of rabbinic Judaism. It is therefore reasonable to agree with Bertold Klappert when he argues that Barth’s dream of a theology of the Holy Spirit should be an ecumenical and inter-religious plan; a plan which not only extends to Jews but which should also extend to Muslims (and others). Klappert writes:

Konturen einer ökumenischen Theologie des Heiligen Geistes deuten sich hier bei Barth an. Sichtbar werden ebenfalls Konturen eines Dialogmodells im Kontext einer ökumenischen Theologie des Heiligen Geistes, innerhalb dessen, begründet in der universalen Prophetie Jesu Christi in Korrelation zur messianischen Prophetie der ganzen Geschichte Israels, der Dialog nicht nur mit dem von Barth zur Ökumene gerechneten Judentum, sondern auch mit den Muslimen und den anderen Religionen (Buddhismus) geführt werden sollte. Er müßte nämlich geführt werden, weil durch die messianische Prophetie Jesu Christi die Ausgießung des Geistes auf alles Fleisch bereits erfolgt ist: Der Geist ist verheißen!⁵⁸

Klappert argues that this “ecumenical theology of the Holy Spirit”⁵⁹ should be fundamentally *ethical* in nature – incorporating a responsibility to struggle for human justice, both individually and corporately before God.⁶⁰ This is a

⁵⁵ Lindsay, *Barth, Israel and Jesus: Karl Barth’s Theology of Israel*, 109.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁵⁷ David A. S. Fergusson, “Contemporary Christian Theological Reflection on Land and Covenant”, 13.

⁵⁸ Bertold Klappert, *Versöhnung und Befreiung*, 50.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁶⁰ Bertold Klappert, “Abraham eint und unterscheidet: Begründungen und Perspektiven eines nötigen Dialogs zwischen Juden, Christen und Muslimen”. This lecture was delivered in Heidelberg on 12th August 1995 on the occasion of Prof. Dr. Theo Sundermeier’s 60th Birthday. It was emailed to the author on 26 September 2006 by Professor Dr. Klappert. (An edited version of this lecture can be found as a chapter in *Bekenntnis zu dem einen Gott? Christen und Muslime zwischen Mission und*

responsibility which Christians, Jews and Muslims all share because of their connection to Abraham and God's promise to him.⁶¹ This is in harmony with the radical inclusivity of Barth's theology that suggests a mutual interdependence and concern for the other; a mutual dependence and ontological unity between the Church and the Synagogue and finally but most importantly – a mutual dependence and ontological unity between the Church and the Mosque.

One can legitimately suggest that Barth's theology opens the possibility for the Church today to interact with Muslims who share a common commitment with it

Dialog, ed. Rudolf Weth (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2000), 98-122.) Thesis 5 of the lecture, entitled "Die Ethik der Nachfolge Abrahams", states: "In der Lebensbeziehung zum jüdischen Volk und zur Abraham-Gemeinschaft der Muslime nimmt die ökumenische Christenheit aus allen Völkern teil am WEG Abrahams und seiner Nachkommen: (1) an Abrahams Appell an den Richter aller Welt, Recht zu üben (Gen 18), (2) an Abrahams Kampf um die Rettung des einzelnen Menschenlebens, durch den er 'Freund Gottes' genannt wird (Jes 41,8; Jak 2; Sure 9,35) und (3) an Abrahams Offenheit und Toleranz aus Identität, sich von Melchisedek ('Mein König ist Gerechtigkeit') segnen zu lassen. An die Stelle der Dialogmodelle der Exklusivität, Überlegenheit und Toleranz ohne Identität tritt so die Beziehung in Unterscheidung: (4) das Denken von den anderen her (E. Lévinas) und die Faszination durch den Reichtum und die Schönheit der anderen." Chung's opinion is in concert with Klappert's position when Chung argues: "For Barth Jesus Christ is the basis from whom a completely new dialog with other religions can occur. Jesus Christ as 'the partisan of the poor' endorses Barth's stance toward Judaism and other religions for the sake of mutual peace and social justice. . . . [A] particular confession to Jesus Christ as a Jewish representative of God's covenant with Israel and the representative of the suffering humanity for the partisanship with the poor does not preclude Christians from being radically open toward the voice of God in the outside world." See Chung, "Karl Barth's Theology of Israel: An Impasse in Jewish-Christian Relations".

⁶¹ Böwering contends that the Abrahamic faith in monotheism is what unites "Judaism, Christianity and Islam" as consecutive articulations of trust in God: "As Abraham migrated, he broke with the old gods and did not accept the gods of the new land. Rather, he put his trust in the nameless God, beyond all gods and without locale, who had called him out of his land to a new home. This religion of trust in God became the common root of Judaism, the religion of hope; Christianity, the religion of love; and Islam, the religion of faith" (Böwering, "Christianity – Challenged by Islam", 106). Böwering contends that Islam sees itself both at the end and at the beginning of this development: "In one sense, Islam is the final link in the chain of the three revealed religions, confirming Torah and Gospel, the messages of Moses and Jesus, through the Qur'an proclaimed by Muhammad. In another sense, Islam goes back behind Judaism and Christianity, undercutting its sibling religions, by tracing its origins to the primaeval religion revealed to Adam and brought back from oblivion by Muhammad, who finds his model in Abraham's submission to the one God" (ibid). Böwering suggests that because Islam and Christianity have been "[b]linded by their nearness to one another", they have been unable to see their geographical and theological similarities: "While Judaism is based on the belief that God has spoken to Israel, his chosen people, Christianity has seen the word of Christ Jesus as the messianic fulfilment of its predecessor, Judaism. Islam, however, has defined itself from the outset as superseding its twin forebears by returning to the original religion of Abraham" (ibid.). For Böwering, Christianity is like a middle sibling, seeing itself covenantally tied to Judaism but "at a loss to define itself towards Islam coming after it" (ibid.). Klappert's proposal, that an "ecumenical theology" from Barth's perspective should incorporate a responsibility to struggle for justice, in many ways alleviates Christianity's predicament as described by Böwering. It also serves to alleviate somewhat Migliore's concern in his Gunning lecture, that the Church is currently not prepared for any encounter with Islam, by focusing Church resources on justice issues as a major goal in any Muslim-Christian encounter.

against oppression and violence and for the promotion of social and economic justice for all the citizens of Europe. The Church could also benefit in its own life from such an encounter. But in order to facilitate such an encounter it is first necessary to understand the context of Muslims in Europe.

Recognition, acceptance and understanding of Islam in the West

Smith contends that societies in the west are “just beginning to think about the ramifications for Western society of the growing numbers of Muslims”.⁶² There are now “many new social, educational, and legal issues that have come to the fore as a result of the presence of Islam and of Muslim efforts to practice their faith” in Europe.⁶³

Of central importance to Muslims is the acknowledgment by non-Muslim Europeans of their presence in Europe. This involves both general awareness and acceptance on the part of the non-Muslim citizens of Europe as well as *official recognition* which, Smith contends, “still has not been granted in a number of places”.⁶⁴ This desire to be recognised and accepted focuses on a number of very specific requests for understanding which involve the public practice of Islam. Among them Smith lists: “[t]he building of mosques”, “[c]emeteries”, “Islamically acceptable food”, employment issues, facilities for observing the practice of Islam, “[a]ppropriate appearance and dress”, and religious rights in public schools.⁶⁵

One of the biggest challenges for Muslims in Europe is “finding proper spaces for meeting and worship”.⁶⁶ Mosques have been part of the landscape in some European countries for centuries, but “the past ten years or more have seen a great increase in the number of mosques built for that specific purpose, as well as the conversion of other buildings for worship”.⁶⁷ Smith contends that “[s]ome non-Muslims have objected to new construction on the basis that the architecture is ‘foreign’, that the call to prayer is ‘intrusive’, that there is too much traffic at the

⁶² Smith, “Introduction”, 5.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 8.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 8-9.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 8.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

times of prayer, and so on”.⁶⁸ Coupled to this is the need for Muslims “to have either plots of land that are specifically designated as Muslim cemeteries or sections of existing burial grounds where they can lay the dead to rest according to Islamic custom”.⁶⁹

Another very visible sign of the Muslim presence in Europe, one which has caused much controversy, is the head covering worn by Muslim women. Smith contends that there are reports of women being discriminated against, “including being fired from their jobs for wearing the *hijab*”.⁷⁰ The salient point she makes is that many Muslims believe this code of dress is necessary in order to follow the practice of the Prophet Muhammad.⁷¹

In many respects attitudes towards these overt symbols of Islam reveal the fears of non-Muslims. These have been conditioned to a certain extent by the historical legacy initiated in the Middle Ages by the Crusades, but also by current perceptions “based upon ‘essentialized’ images of violent and changeless Islam, holdovers from the colonial past”.⁷² Such perceptions “are reinforced by the constant barrage of media reports about Muslim extremist activity”.⁷³

An issue which is central to Muslim identity and which needs addressed by wider society is that “while many Muslims were brought to European countries specifically to meet demands for certain kinds of labour, often unskilled, the fact remains that in a number of places unemployment among Muslims is high and that the jobs they are able to get are not commensurate with their skills or educational levels”.⁷⁴ Smith suggest that this situation can lead to religious discrimination against Muslims.⁷⁵

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 9

⁷¹ Ibid., 9.

⁷² Jocelyne Cesari, “Islam in France: The Shaping of a Religious Minority”, in *Muslims in the West: from Sojourners to Citizens*, ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 36.

⁷³ Smith, “Introduction”, 5.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 8.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Having said this, many places of employment and public institutions, such as schools, recognize the need to accommodate the appropriate practice of Islam, which includes “facilities for washing and preparation for the prayer, a place for the prayer itself, consideration of time off for the observance of Islamic religious holidays or participation in the pilgrimage to Mecca, and special consideration of Muslims who are fasting during the month of Ramadan”.⁷⁶ It is also now more commonplace to see *halal* (Islamically acceptable) food available in public institutions such as schools and hospitals.

Some Muslim parents choose to put their children in private Muslim schools, and others choose to educate them at home, but the majority of Muslim children attend public schools. Smith points out that “[m]any Muslims are now requesting that recognition be given to some of the special requirements for their children, such as the need for girls to wear appropriate dress for physical education, the need to avoid unnecessary mixing of girls and boys and single-sex sports, and the creation of opportunities for Muslim children to celebrate and tell their classmates about their religious holidays”.⁷⁷

What is of central importance for many younger Muslims in Europe today is a recognition and acceptance by the wider European population of “a genuinely European . . . Islamic community”.⁷⁸ Second and third generation Muslim immigrants are attempting to develop a positive relation of Islam to European society, and of “discovering ways to create a new European Islamic culture different from but integral to that of the prevailing cultures”.⁷⁹

Classical Islamic definitions of the world have generally portrayed it as divided between the abode of war (*dar al-harb*), where Islam is not practiced, and the abode of Islam or peace (*dar al-islam*) when Islamic law is the rule for society. Although, as Smith contends, these divisions have not been functional for many centuries, “the idea that Islam cannot be truly practiced in a foreign environment, or even that Muslims in the strict sense should not try to live permanently in non-

⁷⁶ Ibid., 8-9.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 9

⁷⁸ Ibid., 15.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

Muslim societies, has been powerful”.⁸⁰ What is happening amongst European Muslims is that western countries are now “being understood not simply as appropriate, though non-Islamic, places for Muslims to live, but that the very environment is being reinterpreted specifically to be an ‘abode of Islam’ ”.⁸¹ Smith contends that for “this idea to fully take root it will take serious efforts on the part of immigrant Muslims in developing a new *fiqh* (jurisprudence) appropriate to the new situation”.⁸² It will also require “concerted attempts on the part of host cultures in Europe to rethink current legislation in ways that respond to Islam not as a monolith but as a representation of a range of different practices and interpretations”.⁸³

Kathleen M. Moore rightly believes that if western countries begin to recognise, accept and understand issues such as those mentioned above then this will go a long way toward helping “reform the dichotomous structure of how we view Muslims’ place” in Europe.⁸⁴ This would also bring greater clarity to any Christian-Muslim encounter.

Engaging Barth in the “secular” sphere

The aforementioned requests by Muslims seem to be expressions Jeffery Stout would welcome in “a religiously plural society” as pleas for deeper understanding between religious communities which in turn would benefit all concerned.⁸⁵ For Stout:

Part of the democratic program is to involve strangers and enemies, as well as fellow citizens, in the verbal process of holding one another responsible. This means taking norms that originated in one tradition and applying them across cultural boundaries, in the hope of drawing undemocratic individuals and groups into the exchange of reasons.⁸⁶

In terms of this thesis, Stout’s reasoning suggests that when Christians and Muslims hold each other democratically responsible for the acceptance, recognition

⁸⁰ Ibid., 16.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Kathleen M. Moore, “Representation of Islam in the Language of Law: Some Recent U.S. Cases”, in *Muslims in the West: from Sojourners to Citizens*, ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 200.

⁸⁵ Jeffery Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 112.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 13-4.

and understanding of each other, God speaks: "If God may speak through godless Communism, why not, then, through the words both Christians and non-Christians speak when holding one another responsible democratically for the justice and decency of their institutional arrangements?"⁸⁷

C. C. Pecknold understands Stout as proposing, in a "post-9/11" democracy, a "reframing [of] the question about religion's role in the terms of an 'expressive freedom' (the freedom to press any and every cultural-linguistic particularity in political argument) which can transform political arrangements through conversation, through a democratic exchange of reasoning across difference".⁸⁸ Pecknold points out that a "reasonable person" for Stout is anyone "who participates responsibly in [this] process of discursive exchange".⁸⁹ Inherent in this process is a concern for the other – citizens should enjoy equal standing "in political discourse", deserve respect as "individuals" and "have a personal stake in the exercise of *expressive freedom*".⁹⁰ Pecknold is right to understand Stout as proposing a "vision" of contemporary pluralistic democracy in which "diverse coalitions and equally full expressions of differences remain possible" in a public conversation which mixes normal discourse and improvisational, "*ad hoc* immanent criticism in overcoming momentary impasses".⁹¹

Stout's "vision" resonates strongly with Barth's understanding of how Christians can make political decisions with non-Christians (and, this thesis argues, religious others) in an *ad hoc* and ephemeral way for the common good of society. Indeed, Pecknold points out that Stout rightly "makes much of the 1934 Barmen Declaration", the conceptual expression of Barth's understanding of the just state.⁹² It is in this context that Stout contends that "democracy will suffer greatly . . . if orthodox Christians are unable to find a way to maintain their own convictions while

⁸⁷ Ibid., 109.

⁸⁸ C. C. Pecknold, "Democracy and the politics of the Word: Stout and Hauerwas on democracy and scripture", *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 59.2 (2006), 201, 200.

⁸⁹ Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 82. See also Pecknold, "Democracy and the politics of the Word: Stout and Hauerwas on democracy and scripture", 200.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., 90-1. See also C. C. Pecknold, "Democracy and the politics of the Word: Stout and Hauerwas on democracy and scripture", 200.

⁹² Pecknold, "Democracy and the politics of the Word: Stout and Hauerwas on democracy and scripture", 207.

also taking up their responsibilities as citizens” in contemporary Western democracies.⁹³ Philip G. Ziegler contends that Stout understands Barth’s theology to be “a close relative to the kind of ‘expressive rationality’ of which he [Stout] is an advocate”.⁹⁴ Ziegler interprets this understanding of theology as:

not so much an explanation or systematic translation of Christian claims into one or more putatively universal academically rigorous vocabularies as it is an exercise in thoughtful self-description. As such, it involves ad hoc conceptual elaboration of the particular *ratio* or grammar of Christian life and its first-order modes of discourse (such as prayer and proclamation).⁹⁵

Ziegler contends that, according to Stout, Christian theology is properly “‘public’ not because it imitates or adheres to some more general form of thought outside its own tradition, but simply because it goes about its business of making its reasons explicit while adopting an ad hoc range of prudent and fitting communicative tactics”.⁹⁶ In this way “such theology benefits democratic discourse by resisting the unnecessary thinning out of moral vocabularies and impoverishment of moral reasoning.”⁹⁷ Stout writes:

There are many circumstances in which candor requires full articulation of one’s actual reasons. . . . It is precisely when we find ourselves in an impasse . . . that it becomes most advisable for citizens representing various points of view to express their actual reasons in greater detail. For this is the only way we can pursue the objectives of understanding one another’s perspectives, learning from one another through open ended listening, and subjecting each others premises to fair-minded immanent criticism.⁹⁸

The kind of theology which appeals to Stout, then, is “one where its practitioners seek to make explicit their *actual reasons* for advancing certain moral, political, and civic concerns with both tradition-specific integrity and communicative

⁹³ Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 116.

⁹⁴ Philip G. Ziegler, “Christian Theology and Democratic Politics in Conversation with Jeffery Stout”, *Theology Today*, 63.2 (2006), 229-230.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 230.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 90.

candor”.⁹⁹ What he correctly finds democratically amenable about Barth’s theological discourse for the contemporary context is “that in casting off false humility it does not cast off humility altogether.”¹⁰⁰ For instance, according to Ziegler, Stout sees exclusive claims like those set at the head of the Barmen Declaration – “Jesus Christ as he is attested in Scripture is the one Word of God we are to hear, trust and obey both in life and in death” – as cutting not only against the world but also against the Church.¹⁰¹ Ziegler goes on to explain that, for Stout, “[h]igh claims made for God and Jesus Christ entail correspondingly low claims for the Church as regards its purchase upon, and disposal over, the very truths of its faith. Divine uniqueness, sovereignty, and freedom relativize the church together with the world, so that boasting is ‘excluded’ (Rom. 3:27).”¹⁰² Stout correctly understands Barth to mean that:

The church is one place where truths are spoken. It is also, however, a place where many falsehoods are spoken. And it is not the only place where truths are spoken. It does not follow from affirmation of Christ as the one Word of God “that every word spoken outside the circle of the Bible and the Church is a word of false prophecy and therefore valueless, empty and corrupt” ([CD]IV/3, 97).¹⁰³

The Reformed delineation – in which God and Church are related by grace across a ‘gap’ constituted by both human finitude and sin – commits Christians to what Stout calls the “cautionary use of the notion of truth”, such that, “[w]e may be justified nowadays in believing P but P might not be true.”¹⁰⁴ It does so because “the boundary between the church and the secular world can still take at any time a different course from that which we think we discern” at present.¹⁰⁵

Thus, writes Stout, “when Christians are considering the question of where truths – in the plural – are to be found, they must be prepared to look . . . outside of [the Church]”.¹⁰⁶

⁹⁹ Ziegler, “Christian Theology and Democratic Politics in Conversation with Jeffery Stout”, 230.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 230-1.

¹⁰² Ibid., 231.

¹⁰³ Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 110.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 249.

¹⁰⁵ CD I/1, 61.

¹⁰⁶ Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 110.

Wherever they look, they must be suspicious and critical, as well as open to the possibility of needing to change their minds. Wherever they find important truths being spoken by other human beings, they must take themselves to have been addressed by Christ himself, by *the Truth, the Light, the Word*.¹⁰⁷

Thus Stout endorses Barth's view that Christians are obliged to be open to, and indeed should expect, "secular parables" of the gospel truth in the world at large.¹⁰⁸ But because of the particular content of its gospel, "the Christian community is rightly and thoroughly self-critical".¹⁰⁹

For Stout, the "participants in a given discursive practice are not in a position to take for granted that their interlocutors are making the same religious assumptions they are", since no single set of theological presuppositions are "tacitly agreed upon as the framework within which discussion proceeds".¹¹⁰ Ziegler contends that Barth also operates with a similarly matter-of-fact version of the secular¹¹¹ when Barth writes that "the civil community embraces everyone living within its area . . . its members share no common awareness of their relationship to God" and so, practically speaking, no effective "appeal can be made to the Word or Spirit of God in the running of its affairs."¹¹² Barth continues:

In the political sphere the Christian community can draw attention to its gospel only indirectly, as reflected in its political decisions, and these decisions can be made intelligible and brought to victory not because they are based on Christian premises but only because they are politically better and more calculated to preserve and develop the common life.¹¹³

The secular sphere is thus "a sphere of religious contestation".¹¹⁴ Here, Ziegler argues, the "pluriform practices and discourses of gratitude and reverence believed to befit 'the sources of our existence and progress through life' encounter,

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ See CD IV/3, 38-165.

¹⁰⁹ Ziegler, "Christian Theology and Democratic Politics in Conversation with Jeffery Stout", 231.

¹¹⁰ Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 97, 100.

¹¹¹ Ziegler, "Christian Theology and Democratic Politics in Conversation with Jeffery Stout", 232.

¹¹² Barth, "The Christian Community and the Civil Community", 151.

¹¹³ Ibid., 183.

¹¹⁴ Ziegler, "Christian Theology and Democratic Politics in Conversation with Jeffery Stout", 233.

interrogate, and criticize each other.”¹¹⁵ According to Ziegler “this is not a religionless, metareligious, or religion-neutral discursive space”.¹¹⁶ It is a space where Christian citizens are at liberty to make their reasoning explicit and so expose it to interrogation. But here they are also at liberty to put their questions to democratic piety – and indeed to all other modes of piety – regarding whether the faith and hope in liberal virtue expressed in its reasoning are sufficient to sustain human freedom, justice, and welfare and to see them flourish.

Ziegler is right to suggest that Barth understands that Christians are obliged by their faith to accept Stout’s invitation to engage other citizens in this secular sphere for the sake of human well-being.¹¹⁷ The Church therefore should not perceive itself “as in opposition to . . . contemporary secularisation, which has pluralism as its consequence”.¹¹⁸ Rather, a stand against secularisation and pluralism “would be a terrible self-misunderstanding”.¹¹⁹ This is because, Jüngel argues,

[T]he church may be thankful that its spiritual goods now exist in secular form. For example, the secular respect for freedom of conscience (which the philosopher Fichte declared to be “a holy thing that it would be sacrilege to infringe”), the secular assertion of the inviolability of the dignity of the person, the secular commitment to protect handicapped human life, universal schooling and many other achievements of the modern constitutional state are secularised church treasures, and not least of the Protestant Church – treasures which were often recognised in their full significance only when they had been secularised.¹²⁰

Jüngel contends that European Christianity exists in a secular form.¹²¹ But the Church is not the “parental home” to which this secularism should return; it is “a

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 233 citing Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 37.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Jüngel, “The Gospel and the Protestant Churches of Europe: Christian responsibility for Europe from a Protestant Perspective”, 141.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 141-2, cf. Barth, “The Christian Community and the Civil Community”, 173-9, and also Barth’s understanding that *lights of creation* can become truth *extra muros ecclesiae*.

¹²¹ Cf. Barth, who argues that “the tasks and problems which the Christian community is called to share . . . are ‘natural,’ secular, profane tasks and problems” (“The Christian Community and the Civil Community”, 165). Barth even goes so far as to say that the Church is more secular than the world: in its essence it cannot be estranged from anything human; everywhere and at all times, the Church is the Church of humanity, of given epochs and cultures, and of a given people and a given language (see

pointer” for secular society “towards the coming city of God, in which church and state will share a common future”.¹²²

For Jüngel the Church should affirm “in principle” the pluralist society which exists in Europe. It should “present the gospel’s claim to truth, which it represents, as a universal claim to truth ‘for all people’ – but affirm it within society as *one* claim to truth *among many*”.¹²³ This is because “the basic Protestant conviction that the truth of the faith can be asserted *sine vi humana, sed verbo* has prepared the ground for the pluralism of modern society”.¹²⁴ It follows then that the Church should also strive for an *understanding* with the non-Christian religious communities. This entails standing up for the freedom of people of other faiths so as to testify “that the truth of the gospel is a liberating truth”.¹²⁵

Migliore, in concert with Jüngel, rightly recognises that in a western pluralistic context, Christians and people of other faiths must take their own faith commitments with utmost seriousness. But he correctly goes further than Jüngel, in accordance with the trajectory of Stout’s argument, in explaining that Christians must also enter into genuinely open dialogue with other faith communities, so as to “affirm the universal saving significance of Christ” while also maintaining the claim that “our knowledge of Christ and salvation in him is augmented, corrected, and to some extent completed in the encounter with other religions.”¹²⁶ John Cobb echoes

Révélation, Église, Théologie (Genève: Labor et Fides, 1964), 28-9). Nothing human is therefore foreign to the Church, not is anything secular, profane, worldly or cultural.

¹²² Ibid., 142. Cf. Karl Barth, “The Christian Community and the Civil Community”.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ A window into Barth’s understanding of religious freedom is found in his response to the Second Vatican Council document entitled “Declaration on Religious Freedom”. Firstly he attempts to clarify the purpose of this document: he points out that the document is not addressing Christians but national governments on their behalf, demanding “the free scope due to Christians and the [Roman Catholic] Church for the confirmation and spreading of their faith as the only true religion” (Karl Barth, *Ad Limina Apostolorum*, 39). The basis for this position is the natural dignity of humanity which underlines this freedom as the right of every human. Secondly Barth asks a number of poignant questions which indicate his own position on this matter: he espouses a *biblical* sense of religious freedom – one that is not dependant upon a state’s legislation nor natural human dignity. It is rather based upon Jesus Christ as “God’s vigorous announcement of his claim upon our whole life” (“Theology for the Christian Community: The Barmen Declaration”, 149). It rejects “the false doctrine that there could be areas of our life in which we would not belong to Jesus Christ but to other lords, areas in which we would not need justification and sanctification through him” (ibid.).

¹²⁶ Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, second edn. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 313.

this sentiment: "Many Christians certainly feel more faithful when they listen in love and respect to what others have to say To learn from others whatever truth they have to offer and to integrate that with the insights and wisdom we have learned from our Christian heritage appears to be faithful to Christ."¹²⁷

Hence the Church can contribute to upholding Jüngel's *secularised treasures*, which can lead to a "just, peaceable and stable social order",¹²⁸ by listening to and learning from other world faiths, including Islam. This in turn would lead the Church to make common cause with Islam. By doing this the Church can advance the Kingdom of God without eschewing its particularity or the particularity of Islam. This notion seems to gain support from Stout's assertion that "mere refusal of the secular shuns the Christian's obligation to discern the difference between true and false words being lived and spoken outside the church".¹²⁹

But there is very little literature on just how to appropriate Barth's theology to do this in a pluralistic context. One place to start would be to investigate if Jüngel's assertion that "the [G]ospel's claim to truth . . . as a universal claim to truth – 'for all people' " can share commonalities with truth claims made by other religions, such as Islam, in democratic society.¹³⁰ Stout seems to support this notion when he suggests that a recognition of various truth claims other than one's own should be undertaken and understood by Christians.¹³¹ What is correctly not acceptable in Stout's view is any form of relativism or pluralism that would be incompatible with making particular truth claims:

. . . all parties involved in the discussion will have their own affirmations to offer. Without truth-claims, there would be no communication, no exchange of reasons. No one can make declarative statements without implying that those who deny the propositional content of those statements are committed to falsehoods. . . . It would therefore be arrogant to assume that one knows in advance which human voices are speaking truly. This is what secularists assume when they rig the rules of discussion to exclude

¹²⁷ John Cobb, "Beyond Pluralism", in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: the Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, ed. Gavin D'Costa (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1990), 91.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 84.

¹²⁹ Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 111.

¹³⁰ Jüngel, "The Gospel and the Protestant Churches of Europe", 142.

¹³¹ Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 111.

religious voices. And it is also what Christians assume when they treat the [C]hurch as the only source of truths.¹³²

Truth Claims

J.A DiNoia's study, *The Diversity of Religions: A Christian Perspective*, looks at the issue of truth claims in different religions within a chapter entitled: "The Providential Diversity of Religions".¹³³ His proposal for discerning truth in other religions consists of three components.¹³⁴

Firstly, there is the Christian conviction that God is the one source of all truth, including the "truth and rectitude that [Christians] find expressed in the doctrines and life of other religious communities".¹³⁵ Secondly, by way of holding this commitment alongside his desire to acknowledge a genuine diversity between the patterns of life fostered by the different religions, DiNoia proposes that any truth so perceived be considered as both *subordinate* and *not opposed* to the truth revealed in Jesus Christ. Drawing on the relationship between Buddhism and Christianity to make his point, he suggests that after "extensive comparative analysis and dialogue . . . a Christian theologian might be led to propose, for example, that the pursuit of enlightenment was subordinate and not opposed to the pursuit of fellowship with the Blessed Trinity".¹³⁶ Thirdly, he suggests that it is possible for Christians to appropriate these subordinated and non-oppositional truths. He claims that such appropriation neither diminishes nor qualifies the pursuit of the aims of life fostered by Christian faith; the appropriation may contribute, but is not necessary, to that pursuit. In a similar way to Barth, he draws a distinction between that truth which is acknowledged by a community and that which the same community is commissioned by its own authorities to teach. He rightly suggests that there is a precedent for this pattern of appropriation in the manner in which Christianity has appropriated truth from the physical, biological and social sciences:

These examples suggest that the Christian community might acknowledge the truth of doctrines in other religious communities without adopting these teachings as its own and without prejudice to

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ J.A. DiNoia, *The Diversity of Religions: A Christian Perspective*, 65

¹³⁴ Ibid., 65-108.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 89.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 64.

its own conviction about the completeness of revelation as it bears on seeking, attaining, and enjoying salvation. Thus, there is no *prima facie* reason why individual Christians might not learn something from the study of Buddhist meditation methods, neo-Hindu conceptions of nonviolent resistance, and so on. If doctrines about these and other matters were not incompatible with Christian doctrines and if they were educible without the adoption of the entire doctrinal scheme of another community, there would be no reason why the Christian community would have to disallow such learning.¹³⁷

DiNoia thus stresses both the uniqueness of the various religions and the view that Christians can learn from other religions' *non-oppositional truth*. In this he has been "strongly informed" by the work of Christian.¹³⁸ Christian's brief examination of Barth's account of extra-ecclesial truth leads Thompson to argue that Christian concluded "that Barth was allowing for precisely the kind of non-oppositional truths and endorsing their appropriation by the Church in the manner which DiNoia" proposes is relevant to Christianity's encounter with other religions.¹³⁹ Consequently, Thompson suggests that if Christian is correct, Barth's account of extra-ecclesial truth can be "linked to a commitment to acknowledge the heterogeneity of the patterns of life fostered and pursued by . . . various religious communities."¹⁴⁰

Christian's brief discussion about Barth occurs in the course of his own discussion concerning a community's doctrines and "alien claims". For Christian, an "alien claim" is:

A claim that what is proposed in some assertion is true, or that some course of action is right, . . ., with respect to some community, if and only if what is proposed in the claim is not an authentic doctrine of that community.¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ Ibid., 93.

¹³⁸ The identification of this link is attributed to Brad Stetson in , review of *The Diversity of Religions: A Christian Perspective* by J. A. DiNoia, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 38.1 (1995), 137.

¹³⁹ Thompson, " 'As open to the world as any theologian could be . . .': Karl Barth's Account of Extra-Ecclesial Truth and Its Value to Christianity's Encounter with Other Religious Traditions", 26. See also Christian's examination of Barth in *Doctrines of Religious Communities: A Philosophical Study*, 212-5.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 27.

¹⁴¹ Christian, *Doctrines of Religious Communities: A Philosophical Study*, 145.

His fundamental distinction between an “authentic doctrine” and an “alien claim” corresponds to a distinction between those assertions and courses of action which the community is commissioned to teach and those assertions and courses of actions which arise in a second community, and which the first community recognises as not inconsistent with its own doctrines, but which it is not itself commissioned to teach. This differentiation is similar to Barth’s understanding of the difference between the purpose of true words of the Kingdom and the little lights of creation.

For Christian, the possibility of acknowledging the existence of an “alien claim” would itself be a “doctrine” of the community, dependent for its authority on certain warrants among the community’s other “primary doctrines”.¹⁴² Moreover, closely related to the warrants might be certain explanations of the possibility of true or right “alien claims”. Such explanations might have to do, he suggests, with “the powers of human minds, with the course of human history, with the status of the natural world as the setting of human life, with the activity of God in the natural world and in human history”.¹⁴³

Not only are “alien claims” to be acknowledged, and such acknowledgment to be warranted by other doctrines, but these claims can also be valued positively:

It may be that a community would have no reason to discourage its members from learning truths it is not bound to teach or carrying out courses of action in which it is not bound to instruct them, provided that these truths and courses of action are consistent with the doctrines it is bound to teach. It may even be that a community could encourage its members, or some of them, to do so.¹⁴⁴

Christian confines his attention to Barth’s discussion of true words (passing no comment at all on the related account of the lights of creation), but clearly believes that he detects in this text an acknowledgment of “alien claims” as well as a “positive valuation” of them.¹⁴⁵ This acknowledgment is to be seen in Barth’s

¹⁴² Ibid., 153.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 178.

¹⁴⁵ See *ibid.*, 214-5.

insistence that such words can be true “without being given any canonical or dogmatic status”.¹⁴⁶ Christian rightly suggests that “it seems clear that Barth is proposing for his own community the position . . . that there may be truths and courses of action which the community itself is not bound to teach”.¹⁴⁷ Christian argues that this positive valuation is seen in Barth’s contention that acquaintance with these true extra-ecclesial words could “make a contribution to the strengthening, extending and defining of the Christian knowledge which draws from [the bible]”.¹⁴⁸ In this claim Christian sees evidence that Barth is proposing that “the Christian community should teach positive valuations of knowing such truths and of knowing how to carry out such courses of action”.¹⁴⁹ Hence he suggests that this text confronts Christian theologians as a text “not only to wonder at but to ponder as they consider what their community ought to teach about alien claims”.¹⁵⁰

According to Christian then, Barth’s theology may be open to certain lines of conversation with DiNoia’s proposal for subordinate and non-oppositional truth claims. Despite Christian’s focus on extra-ecclesial words, his engagement with Barth’s account of the lights of creation as “co-existing” and “not at cross purposes” with the Light, reveals parallels with the sort of proposal DiNoia is making. But while DiNoia is committed to developing genuine conversation between the religions, he believes that any area of overlap in the form of agreement between religions is a serious threat to the diversity of those religions.

Thompson is right to criticise DiNoia’s resistance to agreement because:

[it] involves the assumption that each religion would be so significantly defined and characterised by any such overlap that the overlap does indeed seriously compromise the diversity. Implicit, . . . , is a strongly homogeneous understanding of any single religion. It is assumed that any such overlap refers to each religion in equal measure; each religion would be equally defined by that over which they agree. There seems no allowance for a level of heterogeneity within each religion which would allow for the possibility of overlaps which would be of different levels of importance for each religion and

¹⁴⁶ CD IV/3, 134.

¹⁴⁷ Christian, *Doctrines of Religious Communities: A Philosophical Study*, 214.

¹⁴⁸ CD IV/3, 134.

¹⁴⁹ Christian, *Doctrines of Religious Communities: A Philosophical Study*, 215.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

which did not threaten the basic identity of each religion or the fundamental distinction between them.¹⁵¹

In DiNoia's configuration, the religions can only encounter each other as discrete homogeneous entities. Thompson is right to argue that this configuration can embrace Barth's idea of extra ecclesial lights, which are quasi-independent of the one true Light, but not Barth's concept of extra- ecclesial words, which point to Christ and are relevant for the Church.¹⁵² Barth's understanding of truth outwith the Church is a subtle and complex concept which does not readily fit into the exclusivist, inclusivist or pluralist frameworks against which DiNoia is reacting.¹⁵³ As Chapter 1 has shown, and as Gavin D'Costa states: "Barth . . . overturns these categories by being both exclusivist, inclusivist, and universalist all at once!"¹⁵⁴ For Barth, the little lights of creation can, under certain circumstances, *become* true words of the Kingdom. In this sense Barth's work provides a more fluid understanding of truth claims than is offered by DiNoia's more rigid understanding. Hence Barth provides unexpected potential for inter-religious encounter. Nevertheless, DiNoia's identification of non-oppositional or subordinate truth claims in other faith systems lends support to this potential in Barth's work – but only qualified support for agreement between religions is *not necessarily* a threat to their diversity.

It is possible to make a connection between Barth's account of extra-ecclesial truth and world religions within the arena of modern European society. This is the connection which would bring Barth's ideas into the current quest to couple a commitment to discern God's presence in both Christianity and the non- Christian religions (in particular Islam) for the well-being of all citizens, with an equally strong

¹⁵¹ Thompson, " 'As open to the world as any theologian could be . . .': Karl Barth's Account of Extra-Ecclesial Truth and Its Value to Christianity's Encounter with Other Religious Traditions", 164.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ DiNoia's insistence on the diversity of religions is driven by his rejection of the "soteriocentric principle" which he argues has sustained the dominance of "exclusivism", "inclusivism" and "pluralism" as frameworks for Christianity's encounter with other religions (see DiNoia, *The Diversity of Religions*, 43-64). The "soteriocentric principle" is founded on "the universality of salvation" where "all human beings who have ever lived, including those who lived before the appearance of the Christian community, are called to participate in a relationship of union with the Triune God" (ibid., 70). DiNoia renounces any *a priori* attempt to describe the aims of other religions as *salvific*.

¹⁵⁴ D'Costa, "Theology of Religions", 630.

commitment to acknowledge the genuine diversity of those religions in contemporary Europe. What is offered by Barth, then, is a framework which is able to combine an understanding of diversity which is not threatened by *ad hoc* “agreements” between religions – a framework which, on the one hand, recognises the religions’ “independence” and “distinctive particularity” and, on the other, recognises their “interdependence” on the universality of God as “the unconditional ground of all being and meaning”.¹⁵⁵

A Framework for Compatibility

One specific possibility for developing such a framework can stem from Cobb’s understanding of religions traditions; an understanding which is sympathetic to Barth’s view. Cobb suggests that “the great religious traditions are [not] well understood as religions, that is, as traditions for which being religious is the central goal”.¹⁵⁶ One should give up the notion of having “an essence of religion”¹⁵⁷ which characterizes all religions and instead replace this with the understanding that “individual religious traditions” are particular in nature.¹⁵⁸ Hence he proposes a “pluralism that allows each religious tradition to define its own nature and purposes and the role of religious elements within it”.¹⁵⁹ This is sympathetic to Jüngel’s assertion that “the gospel’s claim to truth . . . as a universal claim to truth – ‘for all people’ ” can be affirmed within contemporary pluralist society “as *one* claim to truth *among many*”.¹⁶⁰

Thompson proposes two formulae which helpfully clarifies Cobb’s understanding:

The two “religious traditions” could be designated RT1 and RT2. The constituent elements could be designated as e1, e2, e3, etc. These elements would combine in ways determined by the respective

¹⁵⁵ Christoph Schwöbel, “Particularity, Universality and the Religions: Towards a Christian Theology of Religions”, in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: the Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, ed. Gavin D’Costa (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1990), 43. Schwöbel suggests, in a similar fashion to Barth, that all religions, like the Christian religion, are “human responses to the universal creative and redeeming agency of God” (ibid.).

¹⁵⁶ Cobb, “Beyond Pluralism”, 81.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 81.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 84.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Jüngel, “The Gospel and the Protestant Churches of Europe: Christian responsibility for Europe from a Protestant Perspective”, 142.

“purposes” and “goals” of RT1 and RT2. Diversity and overlap combine as follows:

RT1: e1 + e2 + e3 + e4 etc.

RT2: e4 + e5 + e6 + e7 etc.

At the point of overlap, i.e., e4, the religious traditions are brought into a relationship which does not violate the more comprehensive differentiation between RT1 and RT2, a differentiation located in the lack of overlap between the remaining elements in each tradition. The relationship between e3 and e6 may be one of disagreement; that between e2 and e7 may be one of non-oppositional difference.¹⁶¹

For the purpose of this thesis, the most suggestive aspect of Thompson’s interpretation of Cobb is the provision which it makes for the various constituent elements to be found in any religious tradition. There is no reason to suggest that such elements could not be ethical or political.¹⁶² Cobb’s configuration also emphasises that:

religious traditions are never encountered *in toto*. Encounters between them are always specific to particular people, places and time, i.e, to particular elements within each tradition. The acknowledgment of heterogeneity also allows for the recognition of genuine diversity between more conservative and more radical elements within any single religious tradition. It allows for the possibility of transition and change within any religious tradition. It further allows for various perspectives from within the tradition on how best to define the tradition.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Thompson, “‘As open to the world as any theologian could be . . .’: Karl Barth’s Account of Extra-Ecclesial Truth and Its Value to Christianity’s Encounter with Other Religious Traditions”, 165-6.

¹⁶² Cf. Karl Barth, “Political Decisions in the Unity of the Faith”, 149-64. Here Barth’s theology alludes to this.

¹⁶³ Thompson, “‘As open to the world as any theologian could be . . .’: Karl Barth’s Account of Extra-Ecclesial Truth and Its Value to Christianity’s Encounter with Other Religious Traditions”, 166. David Blumenthal is sympathetic to this interpretation of Cobb. Blumenthal contends that Cobb’s comments on the *permeability* of religious traditions also “helps us use the language of the other to articulate more clearly our own traditions, see that understanding leads to more positive inter-religious interaction, and maintain our individuality even as we search for commonalities. Although this understanding of permeability is not a panacea to inter-religious conflict, it seems the best way forward at this time” (David Blumenthal, “Interreligious Permeability”, *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, 16 (1996), 45).

Thompson is correct to recognise that the appropriateness of this framework for *ad hoc* correlation “lies not just in its ability to tolerate overlaps which do not threaten diversity”, but also in the fact that it is compatible with three aspects of Barth’s theology.¹⁶⁴

Firstly, for Christianity to re-describe itself as a religious tradition in Cobb’s terms is compatible with Barth’s insistence that the Church is “totally and properly both visible and invisible”.¹⁶⁵ The Church exists both in its likeness to and in its distinction from “other historical magnitudes (*andere[. . .] geschichtliche[. . .] Größen*)”.¹⁶⁶ As such, it exists in both total dependence on and in total freedom towards its environment. This is because even though the people of God is “one people among others . . . [it] owes its nature and existence to the new divine act of reconciliation”.¹⁶⁷ By redescribing itself as one religious tradition among others, the Church acknowledges that its worldly form is not unique. Indeed Gabriel Vahanian contends that

with Barth . . . there is a way of talking about the church . . . which is supremely non-theological. That non-theological way consists in talking about the church as one would about Islam or Zen-Buddhism, about atheism or even about Protestantism and Catholicism. It consists in talking about the church and Christianity as simple phenomena among other similar events issuing from . . . cultural influence¹⁶⁸

However, such a re-description of Christianity does not constitute an exhaustive self-description, nor would it be understood as such by other religious traditions committed to such a configuration. Built into Cobb’s definition is the freedom for each religious tradition “to define its own nature and purposes and the role of religious elements within it”.¹⁶⁹ Christianity thus remains free to describe

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 166-7.

¹⁶⁵ CD IV/3, 726. See also Thompson, “‘As open to the world as any theologian could be . . .’: Karl Barth’s Account of Extra-Ecclesial Truth and Its Value to Christianity’s Encounter with Other Religious Traditions”, 167.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 734; KD IV/3, 840.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 743.

¹⁶⁸ Gabriel Vahanian, “Karl Barth as Theologian of Culture”, *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, 28.1 (1972), 44.

¹⁶⁹ Cobb, “Beyond Pluralism”, 84.

itself in the theological terms of its own self-understanding as the “people of God elected in Jesus Christ and called to be His witness”.¹⁷⁰ Consequently, a re-description on these terms remains *ad hoc* and is dependent upon and subordinate to Christianity’s own theological self-understanding.

A second reason Thompson gives is that, although the divine activity is “one and same in all things, . . . it is not one and the same in the sense of eternal recurrence, or as the only constant pole in the flux of phenomena”.¹⁷¹ More specifically, Barth rejects, for instance, the image “of a globe, on whose surface and in whose interior any point may in principle be exchanged for any other, since all of them have exactly the same function in their own place”.¹⁷² As a more accurate image, he proposes, for example, that of a “living plant . . . in which the various parts, root, stem, branches, leaves, buds and fruit are all mutually ordered, in which the presence of all the others demands that each one should have its own place and function”.¹⁷³

As such, the events of God’s rule are not “so many ‘cases’ in the one rule, but individual events which have their own importance and have to be considered in and for themselves”.¹⁷⁴ In other words, God’s “unified plan has nothing whatever to do with a levelling down and flattening out of individuals and individual groupings”.¹⁷⁵ God’s rule is such that “particular creatures and individuals and natural and historical groupings and relationships are [not] prevented by Him from existing in their particularity and for particular ends”.¹⁷⁶

Consequently, even granting its worldly visibility, no licence is given to the Church to consider the world’s various “natural and historical groupings”¹⁷⁷ as characterised by all the same worldly features which constitute its own worldly

¹⁷⁰ CD IV/3, 743.

¹⁷¹ CD III/3, 137. See also Thompson, “‘As open to the world as any theologian could be . . .’: Karl Barth’s Account of Extra-Ecclesial Truth and Its Value to Christianity’s Encounter with Other Religious Traditions”, 167.

¹⁷² Ibid., 193.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 138.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 168.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 167.

¹⁷⁷ See *ibid.*

visibility or to consider them as equally determined by some other combination of worldly features. Compatibility exists, therefore, because the definition of a religious tradition does not, it is again to be stressed, demand that the tradition is most characteristically defined by any of its constitutive elements.

A third reason Thompson gives for compatibility lies in the comprehensive and differentiated understanding of each religious tradition.¹⁷⁸ Cobb's recognition that any single religious tradition consists of various elements allows for the possibility of applying Barth's concept of truth outwith the Church to those various elements. In this way, "[t]he various elements of the religious traditions can be considered by the Christian community in terms of whether they are best explained as human confusion, a light of creation, or as an extra-ecclesial manifestation of Jesus Christ".¹⁷⁹

Conclusion

Barth's understanding of democratic society can accommodate religious pluralism where members of the Abrahamic faiths can strive together for justice and the common good of all citizens. This is because of their ontological unity in God's grace. Barth's work also provides an understanding of truth claims which offers unexpected potential for inter-religious encounter and co-operation amongst the Abrahamic faiths. In particular, Thompson's interpretation of Cobb is useful in bringing Barth's theology into conversation with Islam in Europe today. It provides the potential for the Church to use aspects of Barth's theology on an *ad hoc* basis in seeking to promote common cause with Muslims on issues of social justice and political action by identifying the permeability and commonality of elements within each religious tradition. But, as has been shown in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, this encounter also has the potential to testify "to divine grace in ways that are positive, salutary and capable of contributing constructively to the theological and ethical self-understanding of the [C]hurch", as aspects of Islam *become* secular parables of the Kingdom.¹⁸⁰ Chapter 6 will investigate what such an encounter might look like

¹⁷⁸ Thompson, " 'As open to the world as any theologian could be . . .': Karl Barth's Account of Extra-Ecclesial Truth and Its Value to Christianity's Encounter with Other Religious Traditions", 168.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ David A. S. Fergusson, "Contemporary Christian Theological Reflection on Land and Covenant", 13.

using the example of a possible encounter between the Church, as Barth conceives it, and the Muslim scholar Tariq Ramadan.

CHAPTER 6

An inter-religious encounter with Tariq Ramadan

Introduction

One person with whom the Church can make common cause with on the topical subjects of gender equality, socio-economic policies and the war against terrorism in today's secular and pluralistic Europe from Barth's perspective is the Swiss-born Muslim scholar Tariq Ramadan. Ramadan's work illustrates that there is a basis in Islam for open, pluralistic societies dedicated to democratic ideals. This chapter will argue that Ramadan's work comes to the Church today as a "secular" parable of God's kingdom, calling the Church to renewed humility, repentance and revision of doctrine.

Making Common Cause with Tariq Ramadan

Khadija Moshen-Finan contends that for many young Muslims

who were either born in Europe or emigrated there, the problem of how to define themselves is crucial. They communicate poorly with their parents, often no longer speaking the same language or sharing the same values and standards of behaviour.¹

This has led, Moshen-Finan believes, to these youngsters "searching for a thinking universal Islam based on individual reasoning. They reject an identity based on their parents' national origin, which they no longer connect with, and also reject the label of 'Arab' or 'beur' they are often automatically given."² This rejection combined with the Islamophobia of Europe in the 1980's and 90's, "9/11", "7/7" and the current war against terrorism has led to "[c]onfusion, suspicion and stereotyping" that has undermined Muslim communities, which in turn have "retreated into self-justification on the basis of [their] religion and religious identity".³

This situation has encouraged the emergence of new activists promoting an

¹ Khadija Moshen-Finan, "Promoting a faith-based citizenship: the case of Tariq Ramadan", in *New European Identity and Citizenship*, ed. R. Leveau, K. Moshen-Finan & C. Wihtol de Wenden (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 134.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

Islam adapted to life in Europe – “an identity that transcends national, ethnic or racial points of reference, a supra-national one closer to a European, even universal order of things in tune with the image of the modern world, where national borders are unmarked and life-styles largely similar”.⁴ This message finds an audience predominantly among a “minority of Muslims from immigrant families who have become alienated from their parents’ culture but are worried about losing their identity if they became totally integrated into European society and effectively assimilated”.⁵

A scholar who promotes an Islam adapted to life in Europe is Tariq Ramadan. Ramadan is “the grandson of Hassan El-Banna, founder of the Muslim Brotherhood movement in Egypt in 1928, and the son of another historic figure of the movement, Said Ramadan, who was sentenced to life imprisonment by President Gamal Abdel Nasser and exiled to Switzerland”.⁶ Moshen-Finan contends that Ramadan regards Islam as a political ideology that applies to broad areas of social activity and that sees society in a political light.⁷ In the European situation, he “sees Islam – unlike fundamentalists operating in the Muslim world – not as a geo-strategic issue but a social phenomenon”.⁸ Ramadan focuses on the place of Islam and Muslims in Europe: how one can be a good Muslim in Europe today. He does this by combining strict obedience to the teachings of Islam with civic commitment and has been described as offering “highly-educated, relatively young, [European Muslim] professionals and intellectuals”⁹ “a set of arguments and his [Ramadan’s] own voice of authority”¹⁰ in a context where there is a lack of structure and fragmentation

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 135.

⁷ Küng accredits Ramadan’s grandfather, El Banna (al-Banna’) with founding “an Islamic order based on Qur’an and Sunnah, a ‘social Islamism’ with its own factories, shops, schools, groups and newspapers”. “In this way”, Küng continues, “a Muslim ethos for the modern world was to develop which would prove itself in charitable and social institutions” (See Küng, *Islam: Past Present and Future*, 445). In many respects Ramadan is developing his grandfather’s ideology, taking it into a new continent and a new century.

⁸ Moshen-Finan, “Promoting a faith-based citizenship: the case of Tariq Ramadan”, 135.

⁹ Peter Mandaville, “Towards a critical Islam: European Muslims and the changing boundaries of transnational religious discourse”, 134.

¹⁰ Moshen-Finan, “Promoting a faith-based citizenship: the case of Tariq Ramadan”, 136, attributing this expression to F. Frégosi, “Les contours discursifs d’une religiosité citoyenne: laïcité et identité islamique chez Tariq Ramadan”, in *Paroles d’Islam*, ed. F. Dassetto (Paris, Maisonneuve et Larose, 2000), 205-221.

of religious leadership and where there are no recognized religious authorities to meet young Muslim needs.

For Ramadan, if Islam is to survive in the West, then contemporary European Muslims must move from merely preserving their heritage to making an authentic contribution to modern European society. He contextualises the predicament of Europe's Muslims historically, vis-à-vis belonging and identity: Muslims have been in Europe since the Middle Ages, at which point Ramadan claims, they created a thriving civilization in Spain which became "the conduit of social, religious, and scientific knowledge to Europe".¹¹ However there is a sense that Muslims feel alienated in Europe today. They do not feel fully accepted, and Ramadan claims they are denied "rights guaranteed to the more longstanding citizens".¹² He identifies the 1980's as a period when "the new and fairly sudden visibility of Muslims in Europe evoked suspicion on the part of Europeans (often based on misconceptions) and, at times, mutual rejection".¹³ The resulting understandable tensions led to a situation where "it has been difficult to establish an atmosphere in which genuine dialogue can take place or close working relationships between the newcomers [Muslims] and the resident population".¹⁴

The first Muslim immigrants to come to Europe were predominantly labourers from "North Africa, Turkey, or Indo-Pakistan".¹⁵ They were "a people of modest means who were under severe economic pressures . . . some of which still continue for Muslim immigrants today: unemployment, rejection, alienation, violence".¹⁶ Ramadan pinpoints a number of issues which made it difficult for these immigrants to consider staying permanently in Europe: "[t]heir generally low educational standing, their tentative status in the European host countries, and their concern for the larger family unit".¹⁷ It was therefore left to the second and third generations to bring about changes in the mindset of these early immigrants;

¹¹ Tariq Ramadan, "Islam and Muslims in Europe: A Silent Revolution toward Rediscovery", in *Muslims in the West: from Sojourners to Citizens*, ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 158.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Muslims are now demonstrating that their presence in Europe is not only a reality but a permanent choice. They are a new emerging community with a developing European character and culture, a community which includes “numerous converts to Islam who, along with the young generations of Muslims who have now become European, are at home in Europe: they are European citizens; *European and Muslim*”.¹⁸

More recently, the Muslim community of Europe has had to face the backlash from a number of international events that have had a deep impact in shaping the perceptions of Islam of European citizens. Among the most influential Ramadan cites are “the Iranian revolution of 1979, the Salman Rushdie affair, the ‘madness’ of the Taliban in Afghanistan, intermittent violence in the Middle East, and the daily horror of Islamist repression in Algeria”.¹⁹ Other situations can be added to the list, such as the horrific events of “9/11” and the subsequent war against terrorism in Afghanistan and Iraq, the terrorist attack of “7/7”, the process of extraordinary rendition and the housing of enemy combatants at Guantanamo Bay.²⁰ These factors, combined with an ever increasing security interest in the Muslim population, have contributed to what Ramadan terms “such a negative perspective [which] is currently a widespread phenomenon that transcends . . . national European borders”.²¹ He bemoans the negative coverage of the Muslim world in Western academia and the media. He contends that unfavourable and blatantly biased portrayals of Islam and the Muslim world have increased exponentially since the events of “9/11”,²² and recognises that “it would be easy to come to the conclusion that Islam is incompatible with European legislation or mindset and, by the same token, that it is impossible for Muslims to integrate” in Europe.²³

But surprisingly, and somewhat controversially for an Islamic scholar, Ramadan argues that the central notions of “modernity” such as democracy,

¹⁸ Tariq Ramadan, *To be a European Muslim* (Leicester: The Islam Foundation, 1999), 120.

¹⁹ Ramadan, “Islam and Muslims in Europe: A Silent Revolution toward Rediscovery”, 159.

²⁰ At the time of writing, British security services had just prevented major bombing attacks in London and Glasgow attributed to Islamic extremists (July 2007).

²¹ Ramadan, “Islam and Muslims in Europe: A Silent Revolution toward Rediscovery”, 159.

²² Tariq Ramadan, *Islam, the West and the Challenges of Modernity* trans. Saïd Amghar (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation: 2004), 201, cf Tariq Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 84.

²³ Ramadan, “Islam and Muslims in Europe: A Silent Revolution toward Rediscovery”, 159.

pluralism, human rights, and the protection of minorities are compatible with a true Islamic perspective. “Nothing in Islam is opposed to modernity and we can firmly state that the Muslim thinkers and ‘*ulamā*’ (savants) who are opposed to this notion and to the idea of change and evolution that it covers often confuse it with the model which is current in the West.”²⁴ Ramadan believes that Muslims should distinguish between the ritual and the mundane aspects of their faith. He rightly denies that a true separation of state and religion is possible since everyone – secularists and atheists alike – is motivated by their values. Indeed, there can be no religion or ideology without social ethics and effects. Muslims must, however, make clear that there is no particular “Islamic State” to be imposed upon Europe and that their social engagement in European society is not necessarily missionary. It is important therefore for Muslims to learn that their faith contains no injunctions against democratic government. In this way they can accept democratic methods under duress yet remain faithful to their principles.²⁵ Muslims therefore should enter the democratic system by making an authentic contribution to it, asking for respect rather than mere toleration. This approach encourages Muslims to consider themselves at home in the West, to overcome their sectarian divisions on ethnic, national, language, and sectarian grounds and to become more self-critical and more rational.²⁶ Ramadan rightly contends that isolation and ghettoization will not work. Muslims have to be exposed to their Western environment, or they will develop a victim mentality instead of learning how to cope selectively with a West that is neither wholly good nor bad. Indeed, since Muslims are secure in the West, it is no longer

²⁴ Ramadan, *Islam, the West and the Challenges of Modernity*, 307. For an Islamic critique of Ramadan’s position see Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi’, “Review of Islam, the West and the Challenges of Modernity”, *Islamic Studies*, 41.3 (2002), 507-515. For recognition of Ramadan as a protagonist of ‘Euro-Islam’ see Enes Karić, “Is ‘Euro-Islam’ a Myth, Challenge or a Real Opportunity for Muslims and Europe?”, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 22.2 (2002), 435-442; Michael S. Merry, “Islam versus (Liberal) Pluralism? A Response to Ahmad Yousif”, *Journal of Muslim Affairs*, 24.1 (2004), 123-139; Andrew F. March, “The Demands of Citizenship: Transplanting Political Liberalism into the language of Islam”, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 25.3 (2005), 317-345.

²⁵ Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 158-160. Ramadan believes that Muslims are under a moral and social contract with the country in which they reside. The secular European model permits them to practice their faith without requiring a complete assimilation into the new culture and, thereby, partial disconnection from their Muslim identity. The ancient division of the world into denominations of abode of war and abode of Islam is now no longer valid because it does not take into account the realities of modern life in Europe. Muslims should consider themselves full citizens of the European nations in which they reside and so participate fully in the organizational, economic, and political affairs of the country without compromising their own values. (See Ramadan, “Islam and Muslims in Europe: A Silent Revolution toward Rediscovery”, 161.)

²⁶ Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 105-6.

dar al-harb (the abode of war) nor are so-called Islamic countries any longer *dar al-islam* (the abode of Islam).²⁷

On the topic of inter-religious encounter, Ramadan is right to point out that those from different faith traditions who meet in dialogue are not usually representative of their own religious community; yet those who are representative do not meet.²⁸ He writes: “[D]ialogue is well under way between specialists from each religion who are more or less open-minded, while ordinary believers meet only rarely and the most entrenched and radical views are never voiced.”²⁹ Interestingly he notes that there are more Muslim-Christian encounters than equally important intra-communal ones between the branches of Islam. He is right to observe that dialogue presupposes a mutual recognition of the legitimacy of the other, and that neither should act as exegete of the other’s scriptures.³⁰ Yet Ramadan seeks to go further than simply dialogue: he is sympathetic to “shared involvement” and “joint action” among religious traditions. In this context, Ramadan believes that there has to be recognition that people of differing faiths “hold a great number of convictions and values in common”.³¹ Specifically this thesis seeks to argue that the Church can make common cause with Ramadan, through Barth’s perspective, not only on issues relating to the secularised treasures of gender equality and social and economic justice, but also, more controversially, in connection with the war against terrorism.

Gender Equality

Ramadan is scathing of discrimination against women in Muslim families and societies, both West and East, under diverse pretexts:

In the minds of many Muslims, being faithful to Islamic teachings with regard to education for women, access to mosques, marriage and divorce, social and financial independence, and political participation means doing what was customary in their country of origin or what “the ulama from back there” used to say. Thus, we find parents justifying their unequal treatment of their sons and daughters (clearly discriminating against the latter) with regard to permissiveness, going out, and so on. Some in Europe and in the United States do not allow

²⁷ Ibid., 65-6.

²⁸ Ibid., 200.

²⁹ Ibid., 201.

³⁰ Ibid., 210.

³¹ Ibid., 211.

women to enter mosques, and if, by happy chance, there is a place for them, it is usually dilapidated and often even without a good sound system. Imams find “Islamic” justifications for “fast-track” marriages, without any preparatory official administrative procedures, leaving women without security or rights, abused and deceived by unscrupulous individuals. Divorce is made very difficult, even when it is clear that the woman is defending her most basic rights. Some women, with the knowledge of all around her, suffer violence and degradation while the Muslim community remains culpably silent and complicit, justifying its inaction and cowardice by reference to the Islamic injunction “not to get involved in what does not concern you”.³²

He contends that women’s liberation Islamic-style can only come from within, and through, Islam, e.g. from a more gender-balanced reading of Islamic sources.³³ This resolve centres round an understanding of the essence of womanhood as opposed to perceiving the role of a woman simply as “child”, “wife” or “mother”.³⁴ Even though Ramadan sees this as an inherently Islamic issue, it serves to remind the Church of its role in promoting “women’s rights, decision making within couples . . . social involvement and female participation in academic and political debate”.³⁵ Be they Christian or Muslim, the Church is duty bound to show solidarity with women of all religious backgrounds as they fight “for [the] recognition of their status, for equality, for the right to work and to equal pay” within society.³⁶ Ramadan is right to argue that “[this] does not mean that they [women] want to neglect or forget the demands of their [particular] faith” (be they Christian or Muslim).³⁷ But what it does do is “to define a certain way of being and of feeling oneself – and wanting to remain – a woman before God and among other human

³² Ibid., 139-140.

³³ Ibid., 140.

³⁴ Ibid., 141.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Cf. Barth’s understanding that the state must stand for the equality, freedom and responsibility of *all* citizens and that this equality must not be “restricted by any differences of religious belief or unbelief”. On the contrary, the Church has to “urge that the restriction of the political freedom and responsibility not only of certain classes and races but, supremely, that of women is an arbitrary convention which does not deserve to be preserved any longer” (Barth, “The Christian Community and the Civil Community”, 175). Ramadan’s statement is particularly relevant at a time when female employees of certain local government authorities in the UK are still being paid lower salaries than their male counterparts. The Equal Opportunities Commission reports that this practice, amongst other similar ones, will not be eradicated for at least another decade.

³⁷ Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam.*, 142.

beings, spiritually, socially, politically, and culturally-free, autonomous, and engaged, as the [particular faith traditions] require and as societies should guarantee".³⁸

Social and Economic Justice

Ramadan argues that:

[t]he Age of globalization is an age of upheaval, or more accurately of reversal, that condones the domination of economics and financial markets over all other areas of human activity. Globalization is first and foremost economic, rather than political, cultural, or technological. It has become impossible to formulate a serious critique of the world order, the policies of the industrialized nations, or the decisions of the G8 without referring to a minute study of the neoliberal economic system, the institutions that sustain it (the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank), the formidable power of a handful of multinationals, and the functioning of the banks and financial markets.³⁹

He holds that "in a time of world markets, speculation on every front, and virtual financial transactions, the old realities of domination, the subjugation of the Southern nations, and colonialism have changed in nature and in name but have not disappeared".⁴⁰ He continues:

It is now no longer necessary to be present in Caracas, Bamako, or Jakarta in order to make decisions; the dominant powers operate from offices in Washington, London, and Paris and from stock exchanges in New York and Tokyo following the new division of labor, which condones a "new look" colonialism and a veritable "long-distance" slavery.⁴¹

In response to this, Ramadan contends that Muslims should produce economists but avoid the reductiveness of regarding men as *homo economicus*: "To reduce a person to the mechanics of how, without any consideration of the ultimate why, is inconceivable, unless people are to be confused with 'things', simple tools, just links in the chain that constitutes society."⁴² He advocates a moral framework

³⁸ Ibid., 143.

³⁹ Ibid., 174.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 177.

which recognizes that collective interests have to be taken into account over and above individual ones.⁴³ Central to this notion is the belief that “everyday, simple, and natural economic activity contains a moral quality”.⁴⁴ Ramadan finds support for this point of view from an unlikely source – George Soros, the billionaire New York financier. In an interview about his book *The Crisis of Global Capitalism*, Soros states:

... market fundamentalism relies on an allegedly scientific economic theory. Basically, I think it was Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher who were the main movers in adopting a vulgarized version of laissez-faire economics, turning it into a kind of fundamentalist position. ... I also worry about inequity. The markets are good for expressing individual self-interest. But society is not simply an aggregation of individual interests. There are collective interests that don't find expression in market values. Markets cannot be the be-all and end-all. These collective decisions, and even individual decisions, must involve the question of right and wrong. I think markets are amoral. ... But moral values are necessary to prevent their excesses and inequities. ... In the case of labor markets, work itself is turned into a commodity. As such, the labor markets often work very efficiently. But you can also sack someone even if he has an ailing mother and may have nowhere to turn. People have to be treated as people. ... I am worried about the replacement of professional values by market values. Turning law or medicine into businesses. I

⁴³ Ibid., 178-82.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 178. After discussing several approaches to the issue of interest (*Riba*), Ramadan proposes the creation of a *parallel*, alternative Islamic economic system to the “neoliberal capitalist system” of the West (ibid., 195). Initially he would allow Muslims to finance major economic projects with credit on interest in order to accumulate resources for a future interest-free economy (ibid., 198-9). Cf. CD III/4, 545 where Barth writes that the political task of the Christian community is to “espouse the cause of this or that branch of social progress or even of socialism”. Green helpfully explains the several quite different approaches to socialism that Barth mentions: “*Social liberalism* in Barth’s time is about equivalent to ‘social democratic’ in Europe today, namely, a moderate socialist position consistent with liberal democracy. A *cooperator* is a voluntary nonprofit association of consumers or providers for the benefit of its members. *Syndicalism* is a revolutionary strategy for reorganizing society by overthrowing the state which it regards as intrinsically oppressive and substituting the trade union as the key unit of productive labor and government: the motive is socialist in that production is for use, not profit ... *Freigeldwirtschaft* is mistranslated ‘free trade’ or ‘free market economy’. It refers to the economic theories of Silvio Gesell (1862- 1930) about an economy in which money would be available without interest (hence ‘free money’), and would also depreciate like other capital assets” (See Clifford Green, “Freedom for Humanity: Karl Barth and the Politics of the New World Order”, in *For The Sake of The World: Karl Barth and The Future of Ecclesial Theology*, ed. George Hunsinger (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2004), 94). Green contends that Gesell’s theories were discussed in Swiss anarchist circles in 1946 “and perhaps among the friends of Leonhard Ragaz” (ibid., 95) Ragaz, among others, influenced Barth’s early political development as a socialist (see Gorringer, *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony*, 24-72). Hence, from the above understanding it would appear that Ramadan is espousing a “branch of social progress or even socialism” which, from Barth’s position, the Church should support.

think it changes the character of those activities. In the case of politics, the huge role of money in elections undermines the political process. [The new global economy resembles the internal crises of capitalism in the past.] . . . After each crisis, we made institutional changes. . . . We have national institutions that keep excesses from going too far. During this period when market fundamentalism has become the dominant dogma, however, markets have become truly global. And we don't have comparable international institutions to prevent the excesses.⁴⁵

Green is right to acknowledge that "the market has won out over state planning as a more efficient way of allocating resources".⁴⁶ But markets have long antedated modern capitalism and there are fundamental ethical and policy issues that the market can never answer. Capitalism has proved to be a very successful generator of wealth that is needed to improve living standards among the poor, but it should also be recognised that "even moderately controlled capitalism cannot equitably distribute that wealth".⁴⁷ Green is therefore correct in arguing that "structuring a just economic global economy is a complex and demanding task".⁴⁸

There is a long tradition in the Church of making direct connections between economic life and the Gospel: in fact the Church is already engaged in a great deal of lobbying. The Make Poverty History campaign of 2005 had both institutional and grass root support from the global Church and made an impact at both the 2005 and 2007 G8 summits. Millions of pounds are given annually for humanitarian aid and disaster relief through organisations such as Christian Aid and World Vision; provision is made for low-income housing and people donate their labour to build houses through Habitat for Humanity. These are to name but a few Christian organisations.

Yet Green is right when he points out that "all this is unsystematic and relatively modest in scale compared to the actual economic resources under the control of church members".⁴⁹ He asks a poignant question: "What might a more

⁴⁵ George Soros and Jeff Madrick, "The International Crisis: An Interview", *New York Review of Books*, January 14 (1999), 40 as cited by Green, "Freedom for Humanity: Karl Barth and the Politics of the New World Order", 97-8.

⁴⁶ Green, "Freedom for Humanity: Karl Barth and the Politics of the New World Order", 97-8.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 105.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 106.

ambitious organization of churches as an economic institution be able to accomplish, in a way that embodies church priorities and addresses social injustices in some significant measure?"⁵⁰ An answer might be found from what Ramadan seems to be saying with regard to the Muslim community's management of *zakat*.⁵¹ He writes:

Rather than continuing to manage *zakat* in a scattered and incoherent way, both locally and nationally by distributing money to institutions and individuals without planning, it is urgent that women and men take a genuine special interest in the social field and develop, wherever possible, authentic solidarity programs that will help women and men toward social and economic autonomy.⁵²

Ramadan contends that "different kinds of support are needed for unemployed people and disabled people, for educated people and people with no education, and so on. In order to build such programs, it is necessary to study one's society and one's community, to get close to the poor, the unemployed, the disabled, to understand the logic of marginalization, the various kinds of social and financial breakdowns, and the range of difficulties".⁵³ This is because "[t]he philosophy of the 'right of the poor' and solidarity that is written at the heart of the requirement of *zakat* requires a long-term global vision that will set in motion a dynamic for socialization through employment, economic participation, and financial independence".⁵⁴ This envisions creating "enterprises, businesses, and insurance and

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ *Zakat* is the third pillar of Islam. Its very essence according to Ramadan reveals "the importance of social involvement in the Muslim worldview. . . . After the two declarations of faith (in the oneness of God, *tawhid*, and in the Prophet), and after the obligation of prayer, which establishes the link between the believer and the Creator, the social purification tax (*zakat*) projects the believer into the sphere of the community, which is thus permeated by Transcendence and the sacred. At the same time, what underpins *zakat* is a full and ethical conception of social organization and human relations: those who have possessions have duties; those who are unprovided for have rights before God and among men. Islam does not conceive of poverty as a normal feature of the social arena and does not envisage that the remedy for this distortion should be the free generosity of some toward others in the hope that the wealth of the rich and the destitution of the poor may somehow miraculously find a point of balance. The obligation of *zakat* puts this question into the realm of law and morality and cannot be left to anyone's discretion. Social solidarity is part of the faith and is its most concrete testimony: to be with God is to be with people; this is the essence of the teaching of the third pillar of Islam" (Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 178-9).

⁵² Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 193.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

other companies that will make it possible for them [the poor] to live and develop in their respective societies".⁵⁵

Barth's understanding of human work can help the Church make common cause with Ramadan in his quest to develop "authentic solidarity programs that will help men and women toward social and economic autonomy".⁵⁶ For Barth, "work" refers to a person's active affirmation of his or her existence as a human creature. It embodies "the desire of men to 'prolong' their own lives and those of their relatives, i.e., to maintain, continue, develop and mould them, to secure and hold at the common table of life a place in closest keeping with their desires and requirements, or, in less grandiose terms, to earn their daily bread and a little more".⁵⁷ For Barth, then, work establishes a level of autonomy in caring for one's own life which doesn't necessarily exclude being assisted by others.⁵⁸

Barth posits that work ought to take place in cooperation with others. But often it appears primarily as an isolated or hostile "struggle for existence".⁵⁹ What should be governed by mutual co-ordination of human needs is perverted by the lust for security that superabundance brings, for possessions and for power over others. But "[t]he genuine and vital claims of man are not empty and inordinate desires of this kind".⁶⁰ When, however, the organization of work involves concentrated private ownership of the means of production, the opportunity arises for these desires to be expressed structurally in the exploitation of persons who, possessing limited economic power, are unable in truth to deal on fair terms with their employers regarding the contract of labour. Werpehowski notes:

Barth here cites a violation of commutative justice that effectively treats the weak merely as means or instruments to the interests of others; appeal to the value of freedom in striking agreements and exchanges masks the fundamental unfairness of background conditions of power and resources.⁶¹

⁵⁵ Ibid., 197.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 193.

⁵⁷ CD III/4, 525.

⁵⁸ Cf. Ramadan's desire for social and economic autonomy.

⁵⁹ CD III/4, 538.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ William Werpehowski, "Karl Barth and politics", in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 236, referencing J. P. Gunneman, "Capitalism and

Barth challenges Western Churches to champion “the weak against any encroachment on the part of the strong”⁶² through “counter-movements” which may be described as “socialism in the form most helpful in a specific time and place and in a specific situation”.⁶³ But the Church’s “decisive word cannot consist in the proclamation of social progress or socialism. It can consist only in the proclamation of the revolution of God against ‘all ungodliness and unrighteousness of man’ (Rom. 1:18), i.e., in the proclamation of His kingdom as it has already come and comes.”⁶⁴

“Still”, Werpehowski contends, “the decisive word may include a political witness” which might be a form of socialism and which “would correspond to the Kingdom by realizing to some greater degree the humanization and hence fellow humanity of work.”⁶⁵ Barth’s call for counter-movements to champion “the weak against any kind of encroachment on the part of the strong” demonstrates in fact a “preferential option for the poor”.⁶⁶ His understanding thus encourages the Church to see that what Ramadan is proposing is in fact a counter-movement, specifically for Muslims, of the type Barth advocates and one that should be supported by the Church. This understanding “completes and does not jeopardize the commended community of mutual assistance; for those who are most marginalized and powerless to take part in communal life are cherished and honoured as the human creatures they are through special efforts to enable and empower them to participate in this way”.⁶⁷

The War Against Terrorism

On the issues of citizenship, nationality and religion, Ramadan supports the idea of nation-state citizenship; he formulates his support of this around the principle of an agreed treaty between the state and the individual taking an oath. In defence of this view Ramadan observes that “there is absolutely no contradiction in that matter between their citizenship and their being Muslims: the law allows them to act in this

Commutative Justice”, in *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* 1985 (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1986), 101-22.

⁶² CD III/3, 544.

⁶³ Ibid., 545.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Werpehowski, “Karl Barth and politics”, 236.

⁶⁶ Ibid. Cf. Ramadan who terms this the “right of the poor” (See *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 193).

⁶⁷ Ibid.

sense, their faith commands it".⁶⁸ Where and when a conflict of interest occurs between an individual's Muslim identity and national duty, Ramadan refers to an interpretation in secular legislation commonly called "the clause of conscience".⁶⁹ He suggests that when religious beliefs and national identity conflict, one should become a passive non-participant, as illustrated by the principle of "conscientious objection" in times of war.⁷⁰ He writes: "This principle has to be respected individually in every situation when it appears clear that the grounds for war have nothing to do with the defence of justice, regardless of the identity and religion of the foe."⁷¹ "Thus", he writes, "concerning western legislation, the scope of permission is wider than that of compulsion. Nevertheless, it could happen that citizenship would lead someone to face or feel a great tension between their faith, their conscience, and the duties related to their nationality."⁷² He appeals to this conscience with regard to the current war against terrorism:

In the name of the war against terrorism, anything, or almost anything, goes. Hundreds of Muslims are imprisoned without trial in the United States, antiglobalization activists are under surveillance, cross-border travel is restricted, civil liberties are curtailed, and, on the international level, the repressive policies of Sharon and Putin are met with silence and eyes are closed to the behavior of our Saudi and Pakistani allies. This is all said to be to protect us from 'those who do not like our civilization and our freedom.' Muslims of conscience living within the West must have the courage to say that this is not true and that if terrorism really is unacceptable, war must be declared on all forms of terrorism, particularly state terrorism, and priority must be given to dealing with its causes.⁷³

Barth's attitude to war would surely encourage solidarity between the Church and Ramadan on this issue: Werpehowski contends that Barth exposes "the self-congratulatory realities of war and statecraft which can be hidden within and behind ideologies that tend to render war ordinary, inevitable, righteous without qualification, and, in one case, not utterly horrible".⁷⁴ So the Church *ought to stress* how killing in war challenges, "not merely for individuals but for millions of men,

⁶⁸ Ramadan, *To be a European Muslim*, 175.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 176.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., 175.

⁷³ Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 172.

⁷⁴ Werpehowski, "Karl Barth and politics", 238.

the whole of morality, or better, obedience to the command of God in all its dimensions".⁷⁵ Christians ought not to assure the state that in the exercise of power "the state and its organs may do gaily and confidently whatever it thinks is right".⁷⁶ They can in this context only make a "detached and delaying movement" that calls "for peace right up to the very last moment", and encourages the state "to fashion peace in such a way that life is served and war is kept at bay".⁷⁷

The Church, for Barth, "is not commissioned to proclaim that war is absolutely avoidable. But it is certainly commissioned to oppose the satanic doctrine that war is inevitable and therefore justified, that it is unavoidable and therefore right when it occurs, so that Christians have to participate in it."⁷⁸ On the contrary, by refusing to "howl with the pack", by seeking peaceably "to keep war at bay", and more generally by trying in political life to construct true peace in international relations in conformity with normative humanity, Christians act to enable discernment of when war is, tragically, morally necessary.⁷⁹ Hence Werpehowski is right in his interpretation of Barth when Werpehowski argues that: "the Christian ought to unmask false and inadequate reasons for war. He or she should contribute to a peace which does not lead to war, and to peaceable measures to restrain recourse to war when it threatens."⁸⁰

Barth's unfinished ethics of reconciliation states that government "is not just the establishment and exercise of the right among men but also, for the sake of this, the establishment of sovereignty and dominion and the exercise of power and force by man over man".⁸¹ However, the vain human struggle to live a "lordless" life can find expression in the perversion and reversal of this order such that "no state of any kind is or has or will be immune to the tendency to become at least a little Leviathan. The threat of a change from the might of right to the right of might couches at the door of every polity."⁸² As a response to humanity's tendency to live a lordless life

⁷⁵ Ibid., 238 citing *CD III/4*, 275.

⁷⁶ *CD III/4*, 456.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 456-8.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 460.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Werpehowski, "Karl Barth and politics", 239.

⁸¹ Karl Barth, *The Christian Life, Church Dogmatics, IV/4, Lecture Fragments*, 219.

⁸² Ibid., 221.

that justifies the “right of might” by governments, the Church, in the light of Barth’s understanding of political power before God, ought to make common cause with Ramadan over the current war against terrorism. While the Christian community from Barth’s perspective refuses to rule out war in principle, it should incessantly pose critical questions, and should support genuine peace in the Gulf and Middle East regions while opposing the ideology of war which drives this current conflict both at home and abroad. “Modern War and Christian Conscience” writes:

Being against war . . . means opposing the idea that war is “necessary” or “inevitable”, and that peace is not “possible” . . . it means opposing the idea that wars are waged for noble motives: to restore a universal order of justice and peace or simply to make amends for injustices. For at most these noble motives – which some people do not lack – in most cases provide a juridical and moral cover for the true reasons of war: political domination and economic interest. In other words, to oppose the “ideology of war” means to do what is needed to unmask war by showing it as it really is by uncovering its motives and results, by demonstrating that it is always the poor and the weak who pay for war, whether they wear a military uniform or belong to the civilian population.⁸³

A secular parable of the Kingdom of God?

The discussion in this chapter so far has focused principally on demonstrating points of contact between Ramadan and Barth. But can one press this further and suggest ways in which the Church might learn something new or forgotten about its own faith from this encounter with a Muslim scholar?

It was noted in Chapter 3 that, for Barth, secular words, which are distinct from that of Jesus Christ, are “true” insofar as they stand “in the closest material and substantial conformity and agreement with the one Word of God”.⁸⁴ But, as Fergusson notes, they must “be tested by reference to scripture, the confessional

⁸³ See “Modern War and Christian Conscience”, in *Moral Issues and Christian Response*, fifth edn, ed. P. T. Jersild and D. A. Johnson (Fort Worth, Tex.: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1993), 231-2 as cited by Werpehowski, “Karl Barth and politics”, 239. “Modern War and Christian Conscience”, is the English translation of the editorial “Conscienza Cristiana e Guerra Moderna”, in *La civiltà Cattolica*, 142 (6th July 1991), 3-16. See also “Modern War and Christian Conscience”, *Origins*, 19th December 1991, 450-5.

⁸⁴ CD IV/3, 111.

traditions of the church, and the upbuilding of its common life”.⁸⁵ Their use will always be provisional and carried out on an *ad hoc* and ephemeral basis. Free words from outside of the Church’s orbit are always context-specific, coming to the Church in a specific time and situation. Furthermore, their reception by the Church is never, in practice, an affair of the whole community. This is because, Barth argues, “the right use of . . . free communications of the Lord can never be regarded as other than extraordinary”; secular parables “cannot be fixed and canonized as the Word of the Lord”.⁸⁶ Ramadan’s work comes specifically to the European Church today as a parable of the Kingdom of God calling for renewed humility, repentance and revision of doctrine.

Humility

For Ramadan, the opening of Islam to democracy and tolerance must be drawn deeply from its own sacred texts. Even though there is one Islam, there are “diverse ways” of living it and, while all Muslims adhere to its fundamental principles, there is “an important margin allowed for evolution, transformation, and adaptation to various social and cultural environments”.⁸⁷ From this perspective, Western Muslims, “because they are undergoing the experience of becoming established in new societies”, have no choice but to go back to the original sources to distinguish what is unchangeable (*thabit*) and what can be subject to change (*mutaghayyir*) in Islam.⁸⁸ Ramadan begins this journey by providing a spiritual definition of Islam based on *tawhid* (the absolute oneness of God) upon which he builds everything else: “to understand Islam is to grasp the meaning and significance of the multiple dimensions of *tawhid*”.⁸⁹ He writes: “[t]he first and most important element . . . is *faith*, which is the intimate sign that one believes in the Creator without associating anything with Him. This is the meaning of the central concept of *tawhid*, faith in the oneness of God.”⁹⁰ What is central then to the spirit of Islam is the human need for God, resulting in humility: “[t]o call on God is not to console

⁸⁵ Fergusson, *Community, Liberalism and Christian Ethics*, 28.

⁸⁶ CD IV/3, 133.

⁸⁷ Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 9.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 12.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 79.

oneself – it is to discover the condition originally wanted for us – the spark of humility, the awareness of fragility”.⁹¹

Ramadan’s work illustrates that Islam has a long and continuing tradition of Qur’anic exegesis: “It is essentially the ways of reading the Qur’an that distinguish the various trends of thought among Muslims . . . we find a diversity of readings . . . that can be attributed principally to the greater or lesser role the human intellect is allowed to play and, consequently, to the scope for interpretation that is permitted as an integral part of the Islamic field of reference.”⁹² He identifies at least “six major tendencies” as hermeneutical frameworks: scholastic traditionalism, salafi literalism, salafi reformism, political literalist salafism, liberal or rationalist reformism and Sufism.⁹³ The point Ramadan makes in doing this is that contemporary Islam’s situation is far more complex and the boundaries far more subtle than “the dualistic simplistic readings of the situation that set the liberals over and against all the rest – the radicals and the fundamentalists”.⁹⁴ Yet he is keen to point out that even with this diversity, “*Islam is one* and presents a body of opinion whose essential axes are identifiable and accepted by the various trends or schools of thought, in spite of their great diversity.”⁹⁵

This is a reminder to the Church that it too has a long and complex history of scriptural exegesis and faithful interpretation from people of widely varying perspectives and contexts but who all claim the sole Lordship of Christ. Ramadan’s call for humility to the Muslim world is an echo of the call to the Church for humility as it deals today with many hermeneutical issues, in particular a call for humility, in the face of schism, to the different factions involved in the current debate over human sexuality and the ordination and marriage of homosexuals.⁹⁶

⁹¹ Ibid., viii.

⁹² Ibid., 22.

⁹³ See *ibid.*, 24-30.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 28.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 23.

⁹⁶ At the Church of Scotland’s General Assembly of 2007 a report on human sexuality was presented entitled “A Challenge to Unity”. At a subsequent fringe meeting hosted by *OneKirk* on the 21st May 2007 the report was discussed. Present on the panel was Dr Barbara Wheeler, the president of Auburn Theological Seminary, New York. She was the Presbyterian Church (USA) representative to the General Assembly. During one of her contributions she mentioned the journey she had undertaken with the “Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity and Purity of the Church”, a group created by the

Repentance

In his Gunning lecture, Migliore insightfully points out that Islam actually calls for rigorous adherence to the first commandment of the Decalogue: “[y]ou shall have no other gods before me” (Ex.20:3).⁹⁷ Indeed the faith of Islam in the sole lordship of God echoes the central Jewish confession or Shema: “Hear, O Israel: the Lord is our God is Lord, the Lord alone” (Deut.6:4). It also calls to mind the first of the two love commandments of Jesus: “you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength” (Mk.12:29).

213th General Assembly (2001) of the Presbyterian Church (PCUSA), to discover ways that the Church could live more faithfully in the face of deep disagreements. The final report of the task force, as approved by the 217th General Assembly (2005), identified one major area of disagreement to be that of “Sexuality and Ordination” (See the Theological Task Force’s final report available from <http://www.pcusa.org/peaceunitypurity/finalreport/final-report-revised-english.pdf>, especially page 18). Dr Wheeler shared that members of the working group, while holding in some cases opposing views on human sexuality and its consequent implications for ordination and marriage, were able to learn from each other about the consequences of their attitudes and actions. As a whole the task force came to see that the state of disagreement felt within the denomination was as a consequence of their “mutual stereotyping and misuse of power” which in turn failed “to offer a suffering world a sign of the peace, unity, and purity that is God’s gift to us in Jesus Christ” (ibid., 12). The report continues: “As we observed the disciplines of listening and reflection that became foundational in the task force process, we heard more than the echoes of our sins of omission and commission. We also heard the gospel anew and felt the spirit of Christ in the words and deeds of our fellow task force members. Repeatedly, we found ourselves moved and impressed by the depth and truth of statements made by our colleagues, including those whose backgrounds and experiences are very different from our own. Most surprisingly, our faith was enriched and strengthened by the contributions of those whose views on contested issues we do not share” (ibid., 13). However, not all differences were overcome in the group. Most members still held the views and perspectives that they had brought to the task force, but *all* had been “greatly enriched and changed” by their work together (ibid., 13). In a study paper prepared for the task group, Johnson examined seven viewpoints on same-gender relationships, considering each of them in relationship to the doctrines of creation, reconciliation, and redemption. The study also considered some of the biblical arguments used to support each of the seven positions. The seven view points were divided into the non-affirming ones of prohibition, toleration and accommodation, legitimation as a critique of the non-affirming viewpoints, and the welcoming and affirming viewpoints of celebration, liberation and consecration (see William Stacy Johnson “Same-Gender Relationships in the Church: Seven Theological Viewpoints”, a study paper prepared for the Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity and the Purity of the Church, <http://www.pcusa.org/peaceunitypurity/finalreport/seventheologicalviewpoints.pdf>. See also William Stacy Johnson, *Time to Embrace: Same-Gender Relationships in Religion, Law, and Politics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006). In the conclusion of Johnson’s study he writes: “for thirty years this issue has roiled the church. It has left many people wounded. Somehow we must find a way to move forward together without further wounding. What should be clear from this study is that the issues at stake are not simple; they are quite complex. My hope is that in working through these seven positions, the church will discover that, though we disagree, we are still speaking the same language, still worshipping the same Lord” (Johnson, “Same-Gender Relationships in the Church: Seven Theological Viewpoints”, 107). The experience of this theological task force is an example from which all in the Church global can learn – it exemplifies a spirit of humility amongst its members who recognize the unity of God’s people even within their diversity.

⁹⁷ See Daniel Migliore, “The Different Power of God: the Witness of Christianity and Islam”.

In the midst of the Confessing Church's struggle in Nazi Germany, Barth called the first commandment the axiom (or foundational principal) of Christian theology.⁹⁸ He writes:

Essentially, [the first commandment] is not only something God says about himself, perhaps about God's uniqueness or that there are no other gods before God. It is not only a revelation of divine truth. It is essentially a command of God to the Israelite who is personally addressed. God not only designates himself as lord but acts as such by demanding, commanding and forbidding: "You shall have no other gods before me!"⁹⁹

For Barth this commandment not only tells a person that there is a Lord, but that he/she has a Lord; he/she has a Lord whether he/she obeys or not. There can be no room for serving two masters: there is only one Lord. In Barth's context of pre-war Europe he was afraid that Church was not bold enough to be the Church in the face of Nazi totalitarianism and ecclesial authoritarianism.¹⁰⁰ He asserts:

"You shall have no other gods before me!" I think and speak with theological responsibility when I know myself to be responsible to that commandment in what I think and speak as a theologian; when I perceive that responsibility as a responsibility to an authority above which there is no appeal, because it is itself the last and highest, the absolutely decisive authority. "You shall have no other gods before me!"¹⁰¹

Christians might just be able to hear in Ramadan's affirmation of humility before the sole lordship of God a call for repentance today in a similar way to Barth's call for repentance in the 1930's, in response to the failure to practice an uncompromising rejection of idolatry. The Church has to query continually interpretations of Christian faith that use it for nationalistic, racist, or class purposes. Might it have something to learn from the warning of Islam not to associate any creature or any power with the one and only Lord? Is there sometimes confusion between Christian faith and uncritical allegiance to the state? Might the idea that

⁹⁸ Karl Barth, "The First Commandment as an Axiom of Theology", in *The Way of Theology in Karl Barth*, ed. H. Martin Rurnscheidt (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick, 1986), 63.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 66-7.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 73.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 71.

civilized western democracy is locked in a “clash of civilisations” with Islam, function as a way of idolising western democracy?¹⁰² The words of H. Richard Niebuhr, American theologian of the last century, are still timely:

Christians were tempted in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, perhaps more than previous times, to consider themselves first of all as members of national and cultural societies rather than of the church and to turn Christian faith into an auxiliary of civilization. But the temptation and the tendency to anthropocentrism are universal . . . For faith in the God of Jesus Christ is a rare thing and faith in idols tends forever to disguise itself as Christian trust.¹⁰³

Steven Kepnes points out that “since 9/11, a formulation that has significantly shaped academic and popular discourse on the relationship between contemporary Islam and the West is that ‘Islam’ and the ‘West’ are two entities that are completely and fundamentally alien to each other”.¹⁰⁴ “This, in turn”, he argues “means that perpetual conflict between the two entities is not only inevitable but also natural.”¹⁰⁵

In contrast to this, Kepnes believes that there is “an intimate philosophical, cultural, and religious affinity” between “Islam” and the “West”.¹⁰⁶ As has already been stated, both share a commitment to Scripture and its study. Both are also “facing daunting challenges brought on by global capitalism, consumerism, environmental disasters and increasing ethnic and religious tensions.”¹⁰⁷ Kepnes continues: “The reality is that the West is also plagued by the conflict of fundamentalisms and secularization” it chooses to project into the Islamic world.¹⁰⁸ Hence Kepnes is right when he argues that the “West” should engage Islam in attempts “to address the large issues of religion, secularism and war that together are plaguing the planet.”¹⁰⁹ In this the Church should recognize that it has a part to play, initially by recognizing the need to repent for “acts of violence perpetrated in the name of religion” by some of its members.¹¹⁰

¹⁰² Steve Kepnes, “A Handbook for Scriptural Reasoning”, *Modern Theology*, 22.3 (July 2006), 379.

¹⁰³ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 34.

¹⁰⁴ Kepnes, “A Handbook for Scriptural Reasoning”, 379.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 200.

Ramadan affirms that, “[m]any groups of specialists have been formed in recent years. At colloquia, conferences, and seminars, they meet to try to build bridges, discuss sensitive subjects, and prevent conflicts. With time, these specialists in dialogue have come to know one another and to enjoy excellent relationships founded on courtesy and respect. This is an important gain.”¹¹¹ However, he correctly identifies the heart of the problem when he argues that “these are fairly closed circles whose members are not always in real contact with their own religious groups, and this makes it difficult to convey to the heart of each religious community the advances made in these numerous meetings”.¹¹² Whole sections of these communities are neither concerned with nor touched by the various dialogues that are taking place. This is because “those who meet do not represent the various denominations, schools of thought, or tendencies of the adherents of their religion. . . . [T]hose who hold the most closed opinions, which in daily life are the cause of the real problem, never meet”.¹¹³ Thus the situation arises where “ordinary believers meet only rarely and the most entrenched and radical views are never voiced”.¹¹⁴

Ramadan calls for “mediators between . . . partners in dialogue and their coreligionists”,¹¹⁵ observing:

It is a question of listening to the other side, challenging it and questioning it in order to increase understanding and then of getting involved in working within one's own community, informing, explaining, even teaching. At the same time, participants in dialogue should express their own convictions, clarify the place of their own sense of religion among other views held within their religious family, and respond as well as they can to the questions of their partners in dialogue. By acting in this way they create, between the various traditions, areas of trust, sustained by shared convictions and values that, even though they certainly do not bring the extremes together, do open real horizons for living together and at least allow ruptures to be avoided and conflicts better managed.¹¹⁶

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 201.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

This is a reminder to the Church of the hope for peace it possesses for the world through its mandate to mediate and build bridges at grass roots level. One way it can do this is by endorsing the work of groups such as the Scriptural Reasoning Theory Group. This group provides a space for members of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam to read and study their respective scriptures together. One aspiration of this group, which goes some way to address Ramadan's criticism, is to promote this practice in the public sphere. As David F. Ford writes:

. . . we are in a multi-faith and secular world and . . . secular worldviews and principles have no right to monopolise the public sphere in the name of neutrality, . . . we need ways of forming the sort of "mutual ground" that allows each tradition to contribute from their core belief, understanding and practice. That requires many bilateral and multilateral engagements, and among those is trilateral dialogue between Jews, Christians and Muslims.¹¹⁷

Ford, in many ways echoing Stout, is right in seeing the public sphere as a place where these faith groups can work out "the considerable ethical and political implications of their scriptures; and a place to encourage analogous practices among Jews, Christians and Muslims in positions of public responsibility".¹¹⁸ This mutually critical engagement could transform the public sphere "for the better": "For Jews, Christians and Muslims committed to this the best way forward is through simultaneously going deeper into their own scriptures and traditions, deeper into wisdom-seeking conversation with each other and with all who have a stake in the public good, and deeper into activity dedicated to the common good."¹¹⁹

One particular promise of scriptural reasoning which the Church could confidently endorse from Barth's perspective is "the formation of people through collegial study, wise interpretation and friendship who might be exemplary citizens of the twenty-first century, seeking the public good for the sake of God and God's

¹¹⁷ David F. Ford, "An interfaith wisdom. Scriptural Reasoning between Jews, Christians and Muslims", *Modern Theology*, 22.3 (July 2006), 363.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 364.

peaceful purposes”.¹²⁰ In this way, “Christian-Muslim reconciliation” might just be fostered.¹²¹

Revision of Doctrine

David Burrell contends that Ramadan’s stress on *tahwid* should also serve to remind the Church that “the primary reason it took four centuries to clarify the central Christian affirmation of faith in Jesus (via Nicea and Chalcedon) was the *shema*”:

Muslim denial of a bowdlerized version of “trinity” should remind us of the centuries-long struggle our tradition went through, in the face of a plurality of contending to locate Jesus, to be faithful to *shema*: “God our God is one and there is no other besides him”.¹²²

But this struggle is not over. Muslim rejection of the Trinity should encourage the Church to revisit this doctrine continually as it is central to the Church’s own “hermeneutical framework for interpreting the biblical drama of salvation.”¹²³ Migliore believes, quoting Carl E. Braaten, that “an increasing number of theologians agree that ‘the significance of the doctrine of the Trinity for Christian theology of world religions remains vastly underdeveloped’ ”.¹²⁴ One such theologian is Christoph Schwöbel.

In his essay “Particularity, Universality and the Religions: Towards a Christian Theology of Religions”, Schwöbel considers “the unity though not uniformity of God’s action”.¹²⁵ In God’s revelation, God’s creative, reconciling and saving agency is disclosed by God as “the ground of possibility of the human response to faith”.¹²⁶ The Trinity preserves an emphasis on the particularity of the divine action because it establishes the “history and destiny of the particular first

¹²⁰ Ibid. In many respects this is an endorsement of Klappert’s argument that Barth’s dream of “a theology of the Holy Spirit” should be an ecumenical and inter-religious one. See chapter 5.

¹²¹ Lindsay, *Barth, Israel and Jesus: Karl Barth’s Theology of Israel*, ix.

¹²² David Burrell, “Christians, Muslims (and Jews) before the One God: Jean Daniélou on Mission Revisited”, *Interpretation*, 61 (2006), 38-39.

¹²³ Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 316.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 316. See also Carl E Braaten, *No Other Gospel!: Christianity among the World’s Religions* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1992), 7.

¹²⁵ Christoph Schwöbel, “Particularity, Universality and the Religions: Towards a Christian Theology of Religions”, in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: the Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, ed. Gavin D’Costa (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1990), 34.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

century Jew, Jesus of Nazareth”¹²⁷ as the “foundational event in which God identified himself with humanity”.¹²⁸ It also embraces the work of the Spirit who particularises this action in the lives of particular people. The same doctrine also retains the idea of universality because it posits the Triune God as the Creator of the world. Consequently, Schwöbel writes:

the whole of reality is seen as determined by God’s creative, reconciling, and saving agency in such a way that God’s action is the condition for the possibility of all natural processes and all human activity. Therefore no part of reality can be excluded from the sphere of God’s activity and presence, and every form of knowledge relies on God as the ground of its possibility and as the source of its truth.¹²⁹

Schwöbel claims that this appeal to the doctrine of the Trinity has two principal implications for Christianity’s encounter with other religions. Firstly, in drawing attention to the particularity of “this specific God”, the doctrine of the Trinity demands that Christian theologians of religions “overcome” any attempt to subsume “particular religions”, such as Christianity, under a general notion of “religion” and invites them instead to “create a genuine appreciation of the particularity” of other religions.¹³⁰ On this basis he suggests that “Christian theology can only protest with credibility against the reductionist and reinterpetative conceptions of Christian faith which threaten to compromise its particularity if it adopts the same attitude toward other religions.”¹³¹ The doctrine of the Trinity points to the particularity of God’s action, so that whenever it is recognised, including within the context of a non-Christian religion, it will be in a particular form. This excludes the theological possibility of talking about “a plurality of revelations in the religions” as a way of accounting for the action of God in other religions.¹³²

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 38.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 36.

¹³¹ Ibid., 37.

¹³² Ibid., 39. In two other studies, Jacques Dupuis and Mark Heim also contribute to the development of a trinitarian theology of world religions (See Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997); S. Mark Heim, *The Depth of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005)). Like Schwöbel, Dupuis and Heim are committed to the uniqueness of God’s work of salvation in Jesus Christ. They also share the conviction that other religions have a positive place within the providence of God. All three agree that all religious traditions must be considered in their particularity and concreteness, and,

Secondly, in drawing attention to the universality of God's action, the doctrine of the Trinity invites Christians to approach other religions not as beyond the scope of God's universal presence and action but as included within the reality that is "determined by God". Faith in God as the source of all truth and the condition of all knowledge is for Christians the "basis for . . . the confidence that the truths they may encounter in inter-religious dialogue are also grounded in the Spirit of truth and are therefore not ultimately incompatible with the truths Christians hold as expressions of the response of faith to the self-disclosure of God in Christ".¹³³

Here, Schwöbel indicates a possible way of re-envisioning the Trinity, which is still sympathetic to Barth's perspective, while acknowledging the diversity of God's action in both Christianity and Islam and recognising the sole Lordship of God in both.

consistent with this emphasis, that a trinitarian understanding of God must be the centrepiece of a Christian theology of the religions. Dupuis focuses on a trinitarian doctrine of the Holy Spirit. He contends that the Holy Spirit is active not only in the lives of individuals of other religious traditions but also in these religious traditions themselves. The Spirit of God is universally present and active, both anticipating the event of Jesus Christ and subsequently extending his salvific work beyond the Church. According to Dupuis, "the Spirit spreads throughout the world, vivifying all things" (Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 243). This cosmic work of the Spirit is to sow the seeds of the Word in all cultures and traditions. As the only Son of God, the work of Christ has saving significance for all of humanity, but, according to Dupuis, the Christ-event does not "exhaust" God's saving power (ibid., 83, 298). The trinitarian reality of God is the basis of both the actuality and the theological legitimacy of religious pluralism. In God's providence, and through the various religious traditions, all human beings tend to the ultimate goal of communion with the Triune God (ibid., 313). While the grace of God in Jesus Christ is rightly called "constitutive" for the salvation of all, other religious traditions and their practices "can mediate secretly the grace offered by God in Jesus Christ and express the human response to God's gratuitous gift in him" (ibid., 303). From Barth's perspective, Heim's position is closer to that of Schwöbel's. For Heim, a trinitarian theology of the religions upholds the Christian claim of the universal and constitutive significance of Jesus Christ for salvation. It also affirms the possibility and necessity of attending to the particularity of religious traditions and of being able to discern the work of God in them. Accordingly, the Triune God is unfathomably rich and includes difference within the divine unity. Because of "the depth of riches" of the Triune God, religions other than Christianity may offer ways to realize a particular dimension of the life of the Triune God even if they do not offer the fullness of salvation that consists in participation in the trinitarian life of communion. For Heim, each "religion's end involves relation to a particular aspect of the triune divine life" (Heim, *The Depth of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends*, 268). Seeing the religions in a trinitarian light, Heim concludes that religions belong to the providential will of God. Where Schwöbel excludes the possibility of a plurality of revelations, the religions for Heim offer an eternal pluralism of religious ends that befit "the depth of the riches" of the divine life, and at the same time constitute *penultimate paths* to salvation in the distinctively Christian sense of communion with the Triune God. In this sense Schwöbel follows Barth to a greater extent in his outlook.

¹³³ Ibid., 44.

Conclusion

Ramadan's work illustrates that there is a basis in Islam's own resources for open, pluralistic societies dedicated to the democratic ideals of justice, peace, and the equality of persons. What is important for the Church to realize is that, as it engages in new encounter with Islam, it is itself called to be open once again to reform by the living Word of God.

Christians are called to relate to Muslims in the confidence that God's grace is present even where it is not recognized as such. But this requires an openness to the working of the Word and Spirit of God beyond the boundaries of the Church. For many members of the Church this is counter-intuitive and counter-cultural. Most Christians, even those moving in "un-churched" circles such as the Emerging Church Movement, still use the modernist paradigm of Church/un-Churched, Christian/non-Christian, which emphasises the secular nature of society but either downplays or simply ignores its pluralist nature.

To be sure, the Word of God addresses the Church by the power of the Spirit through the proclamation of the Gospel and the celebration of the sacraments. But as Barth's writings show, the Word also addresses the Church in the presence and the voice of the other and the stranger. The question is whether the Church is humble enough to listen to the other, and whether, when appropriate, it shows a readiness to repent and reform. In the encounter with Muslims such as Ramadan, Christians should be willing to listen as well as to speak, to be open to receive fresh insight and deeper understandings of Islam, and to learn and be reminded of their own faith from this other world faith.

CONCLUSION

The quest at the heart of this thesis has been to investigate the extent to which Karl Barth's theology is useful for furthering inter-faith encounter with Muslims in the context of contemporary Europe. This is currently an issue of deep significance, given on the one hand the importance of seeking peace and reconciliation between these two world faiths, and on the other hand the stature of Barth in the theological world.

Lindsay quotes Cobb as suggesting that inter-faith encounter can occur at five distinct levels:

1. There is Christian theological reflection that shows that in principle a dialogical relation to other religious communities is appropriate.
2. There is actual participation in such dialogue and promotion of it.
3. There is reflection about what happens in dialogue and how it can be improved.
4. There is the interpretation of other religious communities that encourages dialogue and shares its fruits.
5. There is clarification of the role and importance of dialogue in the total human situation.¹

Lindsay is right to suggest that Barth was essentially uninterested in the third and fifth of these levels and, insofar as Barth attempted to engage in critical interpretation of other religions, notably Judaism, Lindsay is also right to suggest that Barth "was woefully simplistic and at times derogatory".² Indeed Küng identifies the way in which Barth construes two central Christian doctrines as problematic to such an endeavour:

. . . the dominant feature is still a doctrine of the Trinity and a Christology which are remote from their Jewish roots, and built entirely on the Hellenistic councils of the early church. This is a dogmatics of the kind for which Karl Barth most recently once again laid the foundations in the *Prolegomena* to his *Church Dogmatics*, and which was then developed in what is beyond doubt a magnificent way in his *Doctrine of the Reconciliation*. But on the basis of a dogmatics

¹ Lindsay, *Barth, Israel and Jesus: Karl Barth's Theology of Israel*, 107, quoting John B. Cobb, "Inter-religious Dialogue, World Ethics and the Problem of the *Humanum*", in *Hans Küng: New horizons for Faith and Thought*, ed. K. J. Kuschel and H. Häring (New York: Continuum, 1993), 283.

² *Ibid.*

which begins with the “triune God” and “God the Son”, a dialogue with Jews [and Muslims] is hardly possible.³

The fact is that Barth himself does not in any case regard dogmatic theology as a suitable site of inter-religious encounter. For Barth, dogmatic theology has a different purpose altogether. As he writes in the first part-volume of the *Church Dogmatics*, “dogmatics is not a free science. It is bound to the sphere of the Church, where alone it is possible and meaningful.”⁴ Similarly, in *Dogmatics in Outline*, Barth stresses that:

... the subject of dogmatics is the Christian Church. The subject of a science can only be one in which the object and sphere of activity in question are present and familiar. Therefore it is no limitation and no vilification of the concept of dogmatics as a science to say that the subject of this science is the Church. It is the place, the community, charged with the object and the activity with which dogmatics is concerned – namely, the proclamation of the Gospel . . . The man [sic] who seeks to occupy himself with dogmatics and deliberately puts himself outside the Church would have to reckon with the fact that for him the object of dogmatics would be alien.⁵

Yet, having recognised this, it is important to understand that Barth’s dogmatic theology departs from the Reformed tradition over the question of Christ’s reconciling work. His understanding of election and reconciliation is far more open than those that were proposed by many of his Reformed predecessors: for Barth *all* humanity and not just some are eternally elected in Christ.⁶ This is of fundamental importance to Christian inter-religious encounter and should enable scholars to appropriate his work for such encounter.⁷

³ Hans Küng, *Judasim: the Religious Situation of Our Time*, trans. J. Bowden (London: SCM, 1992), 316. See also Küng, *Islam: Past Present and Future*, 503.

⁴ CD I/1, xiii.

⁵ Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, 9–10.

⁶ Greggs correctly understands that what is important for Barth “is that the Christian cannot view the non-Christian [religious other] as anything other than the person for whom God elected, who is elected in Christ” (Tom Greggs, “‘Jesus is victor’: passing the impasse of Barth on universalism”, *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 60.2 (2007), 212). This view consequently holds potential for inter-religious encounter, as Greggs notes when he writes, “Christ stands at the door and knocks: but in the power of his resurrection, he makes his way into locked rooms” (ibid.).

⁷ The normative Reformed tradition, of which Barth was an inheritor understood Christ’s work of reconciliation as having only limited efficacy. In the words of Olevianus: “The sacrifice of Christ, so perfect in itself, is both by the eternal counsel of God and by the high-priestly intercession of Christ himself, appointed only for those whom the Son of God has awakened to faith. . . . Hence although

The potential to use Barth's work as a resource for inter-religious encounter is further illustrated by Lindsay, who suggests that Barth was in fact "both interested and involved in principled dialogue with Jewish contemporaries", and that he regarded "Christian-Jewish conversation as fundamentally ingredient to the very being of the Church".⁸ As Chapter 5 has shown, it was simply time that prevented him from further investigating other world faiths.

Barth was deeply committed to the necessary Jewishness of Jesus, and to the covenantal bond of grace that binds both Israel and the Church to God and to each other. Chapter 5 has argued that this mutual dependency and ontological unity between Church and Synagogue should be extended to include Mosque. Muslims, Jews and Christians are mutually dependent upon one another because of their ontological unity in God's grace. Integral to any Christian participation in inter-religious encounter with the other Abrahamic faiths has to be the understanding that this ontological unity incorporates a responsibility for all three faiths to strive together for justice and peace. But this responsibility must also recognise the particularity of each religious tradition.

Barth's work is therefore not a comprehensive "theology of religions" or even a "theology of religious traditions". It is a *theological* resource for a particular type

Christ has suffered *sufficienter* for all, he has done so *efficaciter* only for the elect" (G. Olevianus, *De Substantia Foederis Gratuiti inter Deum et electos itemque de mediis, quibus ea ipsa substantia nobis communicatur, libri duo* (Geneva, 1585), 67-68 as cited in H. Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics: set out and illustrated from the sources*, trans G. T. Thomson (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1950), 475). In 1936, the French Reformed pastor Pierre Maury delivered a lecture at the "Congrès internationale de théologie calviniste" in Geneva. This lecture would push Barth in a different direction to his Reformed heritage. Maury argued that outside Jesus Christ it is impossible to know anything of either the electing God or of His elect, and that both election and reprobation were properly understood only in the context of the cross (P. Maury, "Erwählung und Glaube", *Theologische Studien*, 8 (Zurich: EVZ, 1940)). Lindsay suggests the central thesis of Maury's paper was three-fold: "first, that there is no election without rejection; second, that the decision of God to reject can be affirmed as a theological truth only on the basis of the cross; third, that if our election is in Christ (and if the first two assertions are correct), then our rejection has been taken by Christ upon himself. In other words, the only sense in which 'double predestination' is true is in the fact of its content – election and rejection – being fully realized in Christ" (Lindsay, *Barth, Israel and Jesus: Karl Barth's Theology of Israel*, 89-90). Barth was convinced by Maury's argument so much so that in the very structure of his *Church Dogmatics*, he insists that covenantal election is the basis and presupposition of reconciliation. Jesus, says Barth, "suffered also for [his enemies]." Yet, we are all God's enemies. Thus "the contrast between the elect (us) and the damned (them) can continue to concern us only humourously" (Karl Barth, *The Heidelberg Catechism for Today*, trans. S.C. Guthrie, (London: The Epworth Press, 1964), 82).

⁸ Lindsay, *Barth, Israel and Jesus: Karl Barth's Theology of Israel*, 107.

of inter-religious encounter. It is an explicitly *Christian* theological resource which inevitably constructs occurrences of extra-ecclesial truth on its own terms. As Thompson correctly observes:

... in general terms it is impossible not to work within the terms of a particular tradition, and some violation of [the other's] self-understanding is inevitable. Moreover, . . . attempts to adopt any tradition-free position are largely illusory.⁹

Hence this thesis has been about appropriating Barth's work to see if, in Cobb's words, "one can integrate the wisdom of alien traditions into one's Christian vision".¹⁰ Cobb is right when he suggests that "[t]his is not easy and there is no simple recipe".¹¹ But this type of endeavour "is faithful to Christ and preceded in our history".¹² In the secularism and pluralism of modern Europe, Cobb is correct to consider "whether there are any norms that transcend this diversity, norms that are appropriately applied to all".¹³ He is also correct to surmise that "one such norm . . . is the ability of a tradition in faithfulness to its past to be enriched and transformed in its interaction with the other traditions".¹⁴

Here lies the strength of using Barth's theology as a resource for inter-religious encounter in the contemporary European context: through the particularity of their faith, Christians can relate to Muslims in the confidence that the grace of God made known in Jesus Christ is at work by the power of the Holy Spirit, even where it is not recognized – beyond the boundaries of the Church.¹⁵ Such an affirmation requires that any encounter between Christians and Muslims must be an open encounter which can only occur where there is genuine trust.¹⁶ Fruitful encounter can only occur when each faith tradition speaks with clarity and honesty out of the central logic of its faith. Christians should speak and act in this encounter

⁹ Thompson, " 'As open to the world as any theologian could be . . . ': Karl Barth's Account of Extra-Ecclesial Truth and Its Value to Christianity's Encounter with Other Religious Traditions", 173.

¹⁰ Cobb, "Beyond Pluralism", 91.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 92.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ See Migliore, "The Different Power of God: the Witness of Christianity and Islam".

¹⁶ See Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 201.

as committed and unashamed Christians; Muslims should do likewise.¹⁷ A real danger lurks in the call to openness in encounter with other religions, especially when that encounter is undertaken by those alienated from their own faith tradition. So, in encounter with Islam, Christians should *not* attempt to hide or avoid their central doctrines, such as the Trinity, even as Muslims will assuredly refuse to hide or avoid theirs;¹⁸ this despite Küng's fear that "a conversation between Jews and Muslims on the one hand and Christians on the other" would "ultimately come to grief on the Christian doctrine of the Trinity".¹⁹

Even where there are insuperable impasses on doctrinal matters, opportunities for co-operation at grassroots level on matters of common concern and commitment are possible.²⁰ Whilst having a "trialogue" on Jesus²¹ is an important theological endeavour, any opportunity for co-operation at grassroots level amongst members of the Abrahamic faiths is arguably more important than reaching doctrinal agreement or synthesis. This is an opinion which is fully reconciled to Barth's theology and one which Lesslie Newbigin describes as "a real and already present fact of life" where "[p]eople of different ultimate commitments are in discussion with one another".²² Inter-religious encounter "is not merely the formal dialogue of scholars" but is "the more elementary matter of day-to-day conversation with our neighbours of other faiths".²³ This is encounter which "is very practical, concerned with the problems of ordinary life – the social, political, ecological, and, above all the ordinary and familiar".²⁴ This is an opinion which, this thesis argues, is also shared by "A

¹⁷ See Migliore, "The Different Power of God: the Witness of Christianity and Islam".

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Küng, *Islam: Past Present and Future*, 503. Ramadan contends that "[w]hat establishes difference from the other, and consequently the direction and terms of the dialogue that is to be built, is whether or not there is commitment to the expression of an absolute monotheism" (Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 203). But in contrast to Küng, Ramadan advocates dialogue on the basis of *shared values and teachings* if there are difficulties on this central point (which from Barth's position there clearly is) (ibid).

²⁰ See Migliore, "The Different Power of God: the Witness of Christianity and Islam". For an extensive discussion on matters of common concern see Jürgen Moltmann, "Human Rights, the Rights of Humanity and the Rights of Nature", in *The Ethics of World Religions and Human Rights*, ed. Hans Küng and Jürgen Moltmann (London/Philadelphia: SCM/Trinity Press International, 1990), 120-135.

²¹ Küng, *Islam: Past Present and Future*, 501-3.

²² Lesslie Newbigin, as paraphrased and cited by George R. Hunsberger, *Bearing the Witness of the Spirit: Lesslie Newbigin's Theology of Cultural Plurality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 216.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ World Council of Churches, "Guidelines on Dialogue" (Kingston, 1979), in *New Directions in Mission and Evangelization I: Basic Statements 1974-1991*, ed. James A. Scherer and Stephen B. Bevans (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992), 13.

Common Word between Us and You” – an open letter sent by 138 Muslim clerics and scholars to “[l]eaders of Christian Churches, everywhere” on October 13, 2007. The letter recognises the love of God and of neighbour as the common ground between Christianity and Islam – the common ground which should be the basis of all “future interfaith dialogue” between these two world faiths. The letter also recognises the need within these world faiths to move beyond “polite ecumenical dialogue between selected religious leaders” and to work together for justice, peace and the common good.²⁵ Ford is right when he argues that this perspective on interfaith encounter challenges “Muslims and Christians to live up to their own teachings and seek political and educational as well as personal ways to do this for the sake of the common good.”²⁶ It also invites people from both world faiths “to go deeper into their own faith at the same time as going deeper into each other’s.”²⁷

Karl Barth’s theology can contribute to this understanding of inter-religious encounter between Christianity and Islam. This thesis has demonstrated how an encounter between the Church, from Barth’s perspective, and Tariq Ramadan might appear – an encounter which focuses on making common cause between them on certain issues and values they share in modern secular and pluralistic Europe. Ramadan’s work also speaks to the Church about its own life and purpose by emerging as a “secular” word of the Kingdom of God at this time, hence potentially enriching and transforming the Church.

The decisive conclusion then is that the Church, in Barth’s view, has the potential to “be open to transformation by what it learns” from truth claims made by Muslims, such as Ramadan, who are outside the Church.²⁸ But in response, the Church has to decide if it is ready to listen to God’s grace as it comes through the voice of this stranger or indeed through the voice of any other.

²⁵ See “A Common Word Between Us and You”, www.acommonword.com.

²⁶ See David F. Ford, “A Common Word Between Us and You: A response by Professor David Ford, Director of the Cambridge Inter-Faith Programme”, www.divinity.cam.ac.uk/cip/documents/ACommonWorddfoct07_2__002.pdf.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Cobb, “Beyond Pluralism”, 93.

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